

S E R M O N S

ON VARIOUS

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

VOL. I.

A

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ON VARIOUS



FRAGMENTS OF

VOL. I.

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ON VARIOUS

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE REVEREND

JOHN YOUNG, D. D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

V. O L. I.

L O N D O N:

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S E R M O N S

OF W. A. R. I. O. U. S.

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS



JOHN C. D. D. D.
PRINTED BY T. BAKER AND S. A. DEIGHTON
IN THE Strand, LONDON, W.C.2

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P U R E I N T H E O R Y A N D Y E T

I S N O T W A R R E N T E D T H E I R P R A C T I C E

1892

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S E R M O N

S E R M O N I.

I COR. chap. xv. ver. 58.

THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN,
BE YE STEADFAST AND IMMOVEABLE,
ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF
THE LORD, FOR AS MUCH AS YOU KNOW
THAT YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN
THE LORD.

CHRISTIANITY assures us, that our
existence is not confined to the present
world, but reaches out to eternity; that we
were born for another life, and that our hap-
piness or misery then, depend in a great mea-
sure upon our conduct and behaviour now.
We are taught to believe, that our present
state, is a state of discipline, in which, by va-
rious methods of improvement, our Creator
intends we should be trained up for a glorious
and happy immortality: And that we may be
so in fact, he has assigned us our work here.
A work, in which negligence to a certain degree

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will

will be everlastingly fatal and pernicious; and therefore, we are every where called upon, by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to be mindful of the things which belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes;—to work out our salvation with fear and trembling—to be still pressing forward towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; and not only to endeavor to be holy, but to endeavor to perfect holiness in the fear of God.—Nor is this important business the work of a day, a month or an year, but must be our constant employment, and ought only to terminate with life itself; hence we are commanded to continue faithful unto the end, and in the words of the text, To be steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord—And for our encouragement are assured, that our labor shall not be in vain.

Allow me therefore, to take this opportunity to point out the business which has Christians we have to do, and the advantages which will arise from a faithful and diligent discharge of it.

Though the kind and merciful Jesus has at the expence of his blood, purchased for us an everlasting happiness with God, yet he has left it upon us to qualify and prepare ourselves for the enjoyment of it.—Flesh and blood, we are told, cannot inherit the kingdom of God—the

the corruption and depravity of our natures render us incapable of tasting these celestial joys, which result from fellowship and communion with God in heaven: While we continue in this situation, we are the just objects of his displeasure, nor can we hope to share in any of those exalted blessings which the great Mediator has purchased for the righteous and good.—In order to attain to that happiness the Gospel was designed for, we must banish the love of sin from our breasts, correct the several disorders of our natures, reduce our corrupt affections, mortify our vicious habits, and cultivate in our minds all those divine principles, that are necessary to lead us to the practice of universal piety and virtue. These are the duties of a christian, and this is the work which God has given him to do.

We must endeavor to extinguish in our breasts all these regards we have to sin, and to every thing that is inconsistent with the nature and will of God; and to this end, we ought to strip every vicious object of all those disguises under which it is apt to present itself—should take care to bring it to a proper distance—examine it over and over in our own thoughts—should suspend our motions and desires, till we have well considered, whether what it offers be really for our good—and

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should never suffer ourselves to be imposed upon in any instance, where the case is so concerning, and the venture no less than of a soul and an eternity:—And this we ought the rather to do, that vice for the most part presents its fairest side at first to us, and offers itself to our view with all its false and delusive charms, while at the same time it conceals and wraps up its ugliness and deformity in shades and darkness; and thus not only imposes itself upon us as an object of real worth, but is sure to leave us involved in disappointment and the deepest remorse.—By such a serious attention to the nature of sinful objects and enjoyments, we shall soon come to be convinced, that vice is of all things the most odious and hateful—has in fact no real excellence to recommend it—is the reproach of a reasonable mind—the disgrace of human nature, as it sinks it far below its native dignity, and places it upon a level with the brutes, and ought therefore to be avoided, as a most frightful and monstrous production.—We shall by this means also become sensible, that it is the most pernicious and destructive thing in nature, the fatal source of all the pains we suffer and of those we dread;—that it is the greatest enemy to our happiness—that whilst it feeds us with shadows and phantoms, it leaves us strangers to every solid and substantial joy—
diverts

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diverts us from attending to the chief design of our existence, and engages us in pursuits that will terminate in unavoidable wretchedness and misery.—Did we thus deliberately attend to the hateful nature and fatal consequences of sin, our love to it would soon decay and be extinguished, and instead of considering it as a proper object of our affections, we should be disposed to hate it with a perfect hatred.

Besides, in order the more effectually to expunge the love of vice from our breasts, it may be of use to consider the dismal effects it has already had upon human nature and the world in general.—Before the introduction of moral evil, human nature was truly a lovely form; wisdom and understanding, rectitude of will and affections, the most generous goodness and benevolence, an unshaken regard to truth, honesty and honor, and all the communicable attributes of God himself, were the ornament and excellence of the soul of man.—His body too, formed with the exactest symmetry and proportion, adorned with every outward grace, and shining with a peculiarly attracting lustre, furnished a suitable habitation for such a heaven-born mind to dwell in.—The fears of death and dissolution, and every other painful sensation, were strangers to the human breast; man was not

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only made for happiness, but was absolutely and compleatly happy :—The earth itself was formed a paradise, ever gay and flourishing, spontaneously brought forth every thing that was necessary both for ornament and use.—But alas ! how is the scene changed ! what a mighty havock and destruction has sin produced amidst the works of God !—The mind of man has lost that comeliness and perfection which it brought along with it from the hands of its creating parent ;—darkness has invaded our understandings ;—our wills are subjected to every impetuous passion ;—the superior and inferior principles of our natures have shifted their places, and we are become the sport of every irregular desire ;—we bring the seeds of diseases and death into the world with us, and drag through life a constitution, which in spite of all the pains we are at to preserve it, will fail and give way at the last.—The earth also has lost its verdure and fruitfulness ;—is become in a manner a barren waste, and refuses to answer the toils and expectations of those who cultivate and manure it ;—is subject to numberless throws and convulsions ;—is torn to pieces by internal and external fires and floods, by earthquakes, tempests and hurricanes ; and is so far from remaining a seat of pleasure and enjoyment, that it is become a burying place to its inhabitants, the grave of
the

the human race.—These are some of the direful effects of sin; thus has it blotted the creation of God, defaced the Almighty's workmanship, and laid the world in ruins.—But not satisfied with this mighty mischief, it has dared to assault heaven itself, and brought down the Prince of Life from his eternal mansions, and obliged him to undergo an infinite variety of wretchedness, before he could overcome this formidable unrelenting enemy.—Now, is it possible to advert to all these ills which sin has done, without conceiving in our own minds, a mortal hatred and aversion to every thing that has the appearance of iniquity? Can we entertain the least degree of affection to that which is not only hateful in itself, but greatly destructive and pernicious to all the works of God?—Have we any gratitude to our generous Redeemer, and shall we hugg and cherish in our bosoms his most inveterate enemy?—Sure, if we have any sense of ingenuity, or of any thing else that is valuable remaining in us; nay, if we have but the least degree of a reasonable concern for our own interest, an attentive view of the indignity which sin has done to God, of the violence it has offered to Jesus Christ, and the fatal mischief it has brought upon the world and mankind, must needs alienate our regards from it, and render all its deceitful blandishments

ments absolutely tasteless and insipid.—By these, and such considerations as these, shall we, through the blessing of God, attain to that happy temper and fortitude of mind, in which vice shall lose its charms, and iniquity as ashamed shall chuse to hide its face; the love of sin shall be in a great measure extinguished, and every vicious passion learn to be at rest;—the mind shall then be powerfully disposed to break the force of every vicious habit, by the well-known methods of forbearance and restraint;—the dominion of sin shall lose its influence, peace and order shall be restored to the human breast, reason shall resume its government, and all the various affections sit down in dutiful subjection around her.

But this is not all: we must not only banish the love of sin far from us, mortify our vicious habits, and reduce our corrupt affections; we must also cultivate in our minds the love of God, and all those other virtuous principles which will lead us to the universal practice of piety and goodness, and which are necessary to qualify us for the blessed society of God and Christ, of angels and saints in heaven.—We must improve our souls into the most ardent and elevated affection for God, as the greatest and the best of Beings, as one who is infinitely amiable in himself, and the
 2 most

most deserving object of our most enlarged esteem.—As there can be no real enjoyment in the society of one, for whom we have no manner of regard; if we would wish to pass an eternity with God hereafter, it surely must be of importance to our future interest, to cultivate these affections from the exercise of which we expect to derive no small part of our happiness in another world: And as love to the Deity is that temper of mind which will give a proper relish to his society, and to all the blessings which are at his right hand, we ought above all things to endeavor to inspire our minds with a superlative affection for him, and by every possible method to raise our souls to the highest degrees of a divine love. We should sit down with a serious attention, and contemplate the nature and the works of God: And here it is impossible we can fix our eyes, but we must be ravished with the transporting discovery of every thing that is amiable and lovely, of every thing that is great and good.—Can we behold the supreme author of nature, possessed of every possible and conceivable perfection, in whom the most consummate rectitude, the most endearing goodness, and every other valuable excellence is united;—a Being who is not only perfect in himself, but the sovereign source of all that perfection that is to be found among the creatures—

tures—one who has made a world out of nothing, on purpose to make it share in that happiness which he himself independently enjoys, and who constantly employs his infinite power and wisdom, and all the other glorious attributes of his nature, to promote the designs of his goodness, and to render the whole creation happy—Is it possible to reflect upon such an amiable and endearing character, without feeling in our own breasts the warmest sentiments of love, and the highest emotions of a lively gratitude?—When we observe the numberless instances of his benevolence and good will to men; what a noble rank he has given us in the present system of creatures; how compassionately he continues to regard us, even after we have plunged ourselves deep in the blackest sin and guilt; how ready he is to receive us to favor, upon the least appearance of repentance; with what a fatherly care he preserves us from time to time; makes his goodness follow us with a bountiful supply; answers all our reasonable desires, and even many times prevents our very wishes—when we consider how boundless his love to mankind is, and what infinite lengths it has carried him, not only to bear with our perverseness, and to put up with our affronts, but to send his beloved Son into the world, to try, if by any means we will be prevailed with

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with to be reconciled to him—sure if our minds are not altogether incapable of every tender and soft impression, a sincere attention to these amiable parts of the divine character and conduct, must needs in the most powerful manner engage our warmest affection, and command our sincerest love?—Thus should we improve our souls in the highest regards to God, and cultivate those affections of which he is the proper object: by this means, not only the several christian duties of piety and devotion, resignation, and a chearful acquiescence in the will of heaven, as well as all the other immediate offices of religion, and religious worship, will become agreeable and pleasing to us, but they will likewise be the fruitful and happy source of all those kind and benevolent dispositions which make men useful to one another, and naturally lead them to the practice of every public and social virtue.—Besides, it is an indispensable branch of the christian's duty to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to submit to his government and authority; in order to which, we should endeavor to persuade ourselves by all the rational methods of conviction, that he is indeed the Son of God, that his religion is a religion from heaven, and that it is only by faith in his blood we can expect to obtain the pardon and remission of sin: For this purpose,

purpose, we ought to attend to the proofs of his Messiahship, from the accomplishment of prophecies in him: We should convince ourselves of the truth of his religion, from the heavenly nature of its principles and precepts;—from the intrinsic divine energy of its doctrines upon the hearts and consciences of men;—from the many miraculous works done by the author of it for the good of mankind, and from the wonderful conversion both of Jews and Gentiles into the faith of his Gospel.—And being once satisfied that his religion is truly divine, we ought to submit our views, our wills, our passions, and all our desires, to the design and intention of it, and labor to put on such a temper of mind, and such a behavior, as may not only entitle us to the character of the genuine disciples of Christ here, but through the merits and intercession of the Redeemer, may secure to us a blessed and happy immortality hereafter.—Thus should we, in consequence of our faith in the Gospel, form ourselves upon the model of it, transplant the several graces and virtues of christianity into our own hearts and lives, and by the constant practice of piety, goodness and benevolence, should create and strengthen those virtuous habits and dispositions, which will powerfully excite us to the discharge of every divine and social office, with a peculiar chearfulness and satisfaction.

Now, these are some of the most essential duties of the christian life, and this is that work of the Lord, which the Apostle expressly enjoins us to persevere in with steadfastness and constancy;—Be ye steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord:—By which is meant, that we lay down an inflexible resolution to prosecute this business with the greatest vigor and activity; that we should be so much intent upon it, that no consideration of any kind, no prospect of present pleasure or advantage, no discouragement arising from the view of any difficulty or danger, should ever divert us from the practice of it; that we make it the principal employment of life, and consider every other exercise, as an idle amusement and useless waste of time, that does not contribute to advance us in our christian course, and help us forward in our way to a happy immortality.—Besides, we must not rest satisfied with any particular degrees of religious acquisition or attainment; we must not suspend our diligence from a mistaken notion of our having done enough, but must be still pressing forwards towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus; and be constantly adding to our faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, brotherly kindness;

ness; and to brotherly kindness, charity, that we may thus not only attain to the possession of every christian grace, but arrive at last to the full stature of perfect men in Christ, and to that happy conformity with God, which is the supreme excellence of our natures, and the only genuine source of our highest felicity and enjoyment.

Now we ought to give the greater heed to the Apostle's exhortation in this case, as we are naturally apt to be extremely indolent and backward in the discharge of all these duties, whose performance is attended with any difficulty or danger.—It must be allowed that the work of a christian, has at first view a very formidable appearance: There are many stubborn prejudices to be removed, many irregular passions to be subdued, many inveterate habits to be rooted out. There are many weaknesses to be guarded against, temptations to be resisted, and spiritual enemies to be conquered; we must learn the painful lessons of mortification and self-denial, of patience and forgiveness, of meekness and humility; must lay our account with obloquy and reproach, with contempt and disgrace, with prosecution and oppression, for righteousness sake and the testimony of a good conscience: All these things must be done and submitted to if we would be the followers of Christ, and acquit ourselves

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ourselves faithfully in that work he has given us to do.—In the mean time, if we consider, that the merciful God sends none a warfare upon their own charges, but has promised all those aids and assistances that are necessary to strengthen us for every part of our duty, none of these difficulties should in the least discourage us.—He has assured us that his grace shall be sufficient for us, and that he will make perfect his strength in our weakness, that we shall be made strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and that he will send down his spirit into our hearts, to lead and guide us in the way everlasting.—Let us therefore with undaunted resolution, go on under the guardianship of this divine conductor, knowing that the first step in the way of religion, is of all others the most difficult; the second will be found to be easier, and the third still more and more so.—In proportion as we advance, the seeming difficulties will disappear, till by the repeated practice of our duty, virtue become habitual to us; and when we have once attained to this happy temper and disposition of mind, we shall have as much pleasure in doing good, as we have been formerly sensible of in the practice of sin; religion will then present itself with all its charms to us, and bless us with unspeakable joy and satisfaction.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N II.

I COR. chap. xv. ver. 58.

THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN,
BE YE STEADFAST AND IMMOVEABLE,
ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF
THE LORD, FOR AS MUCH AS YOU KNOW
THAT YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN
THE LORD.

IN the former discourse, I endeavored to explain the nature of that work which God has given us to do, and the necessity of persevering in it with faithfulness unto the end; it remains to take notice of some of the principal advantages that arise from a diligent and conscientious discharge of it.—I have already observed, that whatever discouraging circumstances may cast up to us in our christian course, the promises of divine aid and protection should always animate us to a steady and resolute perseverance; especially, considering that the path which appears painful and thorny at the first, will in time become smooth and easy, and by the repeated practice

tice of our duty. Virtue will grow at last habitual to us, when religion will present itself with all its native charms, and bless us with unspeakable joy and satisfaction.

Besides, by thus heartily engaging in the work of the Lord, we shall at last obtain a mighty triumph, a triumph over ourselves, arising from the conquest of our imperious lusts and passions, which will constitute us heroes in the eye of heaven: A character infinitely more valuable, than that of the most successful ravagers of the earth, who by subduing their real enemies, or such as they are pleased to think so, transmit their names with wonder and applause to the most distant posterity.—Can any thing derive a greater honor upon men, than these actions which render them conspicuous, and make them be taken notice of by angels and archangels?—Can there be a nobler ambition, than to wish to approve ourselves to the esteem and good-liking of God and Christ? or is there any glory equal to that, which results from having our victories over the world and our own sinful hearts, celebrated in heaven, and our triumphs proclaimed by angels and saints above? Sure, if we have any sense of honor, any real love of esteem, we will exert our greatest vigor to obtain his approbation, who is the best judge both of persons and things,

as well as the good-liking of that heavenly society, among whom we are told, there is more joy over one sinner who repents, than over ninety and nine just persons.

It is likewise no small encouragement to the practice of virtue, that every particular act of it, is sure to be attended with the pleasing approbation of one's own mind, which is a source of the highest inward satisfaction and delight:—Can there be a pleasure equal to that which arises from a consciousness of having done our duty? or can any thing support us with greater tranquillity of mind, under the various misfortunes and calamities of life?—The man who can lay his hand upon his breast, and feels no reproaches from within, may stand calm and collected in himself, when the whole world is as it were lost, in the wildest confusion around him: Let him be ever so much despised and contemned, insulted and abused by his neighbours, he has a companion in his own bosom, who will make him abundantly easy, from the comfortable reflection, that he has really done nothing to deserve it.—It was this which supported the patient Job, under all the distresses he suffered, when he had lost all that ever he possessed, even the charitable opinion of his best friends concerning his sincerity; yet even in these sad and disconsolate circumstances, he
encouraged

encouraged himself with the testimony of his own mind, and the consciousness of his own integrity:—I will not, says he, remove my integrity from me. My righteousness will I hold fast, and will not let it go, my mind shall never reproach me so long as I live.—But above all other times, the pleasure arising from the approbation of one's own mind, is then most seasonable and most desirable at the hour of death; for as nothing dejects a man's spirit more, and sends him down with greater sorrow and heaviness to the grave, than the reproaches of an offended, neglected conscience; what pain and uneasiness, what terror and anguish, what rage and despair, seize upon a sinner, at that time when he reflects upon what he has done, and considers what he is about to suffer; so on the other hand, there is not any thing that serves to raise and revive the fainting spirits of a dying man, like the testimony of his own conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity he has had his conversation in the world.—A comfortable death, that is free from the stings and upbraidings, the terrors and tortures, the confusion and amazement of a guilty conscience, is a happiness so desirable, as to be well worth the best care and endeavor of our whole lives.

Nor is the work of the Lord agreeable only in the immediate exercise, but upon reflection also: A man may then look into his own mind without any disturbance, when he finds nothing there that is odious, shocking, or ill-deserving:—A consciousness of these irregular passions he has subdued, of these virtuous habits he has acquired, and of these pious, charitable, and benevolent actions he has performed, must needs enhance his felicity beyond expression.—None can think the pleasures of such a life but those who live it; for there is joy and gladness sown for the upright in heart, which they reap at present from every virtuous action, which encreases with time, improves upon enjoyment, and leaves no ungrateful touches of remorse behind it.

But farther: The steady uniform practice of religion, as it comprehends the relative duties of life, such as goodness, integrity, faithfulness, friendship and honor, is the most effectual method to command the esteem, and secure the good offices of our fellow-men.—The most graceless and abandoned must needs admire such a character in others, however they may neglect to excel in it themselves.—It strikes the beholders with a certain awe and veneration, and extorts our good-liking in spite even of malice and envy itself.—It disarms our angry passions, insinuates itself into
our

our hearts, and powerfully draws forth our good-will towards every one whom we see to be possessed of it:—Who shall harm you, says the Apostle, if you are doers of that which is good; a vicious person scarce will find in his heart to do an injury to such a one; and wherever there is a sense of virtue, there he will always be held in the highest esteem.—The man who can generously put up with injuries and affronts, who can forgive and bless his enemies, whose head is big with projects of mercy, and whose hands are constantly employed in offices of charity and goodness, will be sure to have few, if any enemies, but a great many real friends, whose good wishes will follow him through every circumstance in life, and upon whose assistance he may depend, whenever he comes to stand in need of it.

And as the practice of religion contributes so very much to the good of individuals, what may we imagine would be the blessed state of things, were virtue a general law to mankind, and the obligations of it submitted to, by all those whose interests it is to observe it.—Did all men religiously give in to the universal exercise of goodness and benevolence; did they sacrifice their pride, their passion, their prejudices and private interest, to the one common interest of the whole;

did every one prefer his neighbor to himself ; and were they thus all of one heart and one mind, one in their interests, and one in their affections, what a wonderful, what an amazing scene of happiness, would this naturally produce ! How would it enhance the pleasures of social life, and render them in a manner divine ? How would it banish every jealous and uneasy passion, restore a generous confidence and mutual trust among men, and raise every private enjoyment by means of the public affections to a higher relish, than the most enchanting pleasures, in the present selfish, degenerate state of the world can possibly afford.

I shall only add here, that by being steadfast and immoveable, and by abounding in the work of the Lord, we shall by degrees arrive at a happy conformity to him, in the inward frame and temper of our minds, and in our outward conduct and behavior, and thus in some measure attain to the blessedness of God himself; we shall become possessed of the moral perfections of the Creator; which, as they are sufficient for the happiness of the Deity, must needs be absolutely so for ours: And as the supreme Being is necessarily determined by the very frame of his nature, to be pleased with himself, he must, from the same principles, be equally disposed to be pleased with every thing that is like him.—And can there

there be a more ravishing satisfaction, than to think, that we are the objects of the divine favor, and that the governor of the world is our friend?—That all our interests are taken care of by him, and that all his attributes are constantly employed for our welfare? How must it transport us to be sensible, that we may come to him with confidence in all our straits; and pour out all our wishes before him? How must it fill our hearts with the most enlivening joy, to think, that he will hear all our prayers, supply all our wants, banish every sorrow, and crown us with his loving kindness?—That he will make us wise by his wisdom, powerful by his power, and that all our weaknesses and infirmities shall be lost in the fulness of his infinite perfection?

These are some of the delightful pleasures which accompany the faithful discharge of that work, which God has given us to do; pleasures of so very high an order, that the most exalted enjoyments of sin, are infinitely mean and groveling when compared with them; pleasures so rational and refined, as to hit the taste; if we may be allowed to call it so, of God himself, and serve to gratify the highest and most manly wishes of the human breast: They bear to be reflected on, and are able to stand the test of the exactest enquiry and trial.—Nor are they like the plea-

tures of sin, momentary and short-lived ; they do not perish in the using, nor are they gone the moment they are enjoyed, but still remain a lasting treasure, and are ever repeated with increasing joy.—Besides, they are not subject to the caprice of fortune, or the giddy humors of a malicious world ; they are not involved in the fate of kingdoms, in the revolutions of states or of empires ; time itself with all its changes can produce no alteration in them ;—they cannot be taken from us, nor can we be hindered in the use of them but by ourselves.—The man who has learned to set a true value on these things, which are indeed objects of the highest intrinsic worth and beauty, and is but once possessed of them, will be rich beyond expression, as he will have obtained a treasure none can rob him of, nor can the utmost malice of fortune ever deprive him of it ; since under all the misfortunes and calamities of life, and even in the article of death itself, these will abundantly administer to his unspeakable delight and satisfaction.

It is true indeed, the most virtuous man does not always enjoy such a compleat state of happiness on earth : There are many things to prevent the natural consequences of virtue from having their full effect here, which, however we have reason to believe, will be altogether

together removed hereafter.—Besides, as virtue itself is at best but imperfect in this present life, it is not to be expected that perfect happiness will fall to the share of one, who is not perfectly good. In the mean time, since it is found in fact, that one's enjoyments do usually improve in proportion to the degree and strength of his virtue; the argument taken from the advantages of a religious life, should lose nothing of its force, in engaging us to persevere and go on in the work of the Lord; especially, if we consider that the encouragements to virtue are not confined to the present world; no, religion opens up a future prospect, and presents us with the view of a reward, that is as large as heaven, and as lasting as eternity.—Whatever troubles or misfortunes, whatever trials or disappointments, we may happen to meet with here, if we continue steadfast and faithful in duty to the end, we shall soon rise far above the reach of every thing that is capable of annoying or offending us, and enter with triumph the gates of the New Jerusalem, where we shall be for ever easy, and for ever happy in the enjoyment of all those ravishing and transporting pleasures which heaven can bestow, or which finite and limited natures are capable to receive.—In that blessed state there shall be nothing wanting to make us happy, and completely

pleatly so ; there shall be pleasures calculated to gratify all our desires, and every wish shall lose itself in enjoyment.—Are we animated by principles of ambition, are crowns and sceptres the objects of our choice ? We shall be made kings and priests unto God, shall be set down upon thrones, have crowns put upon our heads, and shall reign in heaven with Jesus Christ for ever.—Do we breathe after wisdom, and the knowlege of divine things ? The eyes of our understanding shall then be opened, so as to be able to observe the wonderful plan of divine administration, the beautiful chain of causes and effects, the surprising connection and dependance of the works of God, one upon another, and the infinite propriety of all these events and operations, which we have found ourselves at so great a loss to account for here below : The amazing mysteries of providence and redemption, with every thing else that can entertain a glorified soul, shall then be laid open to our view, which will afford abundant foundation for astonishment, wonder and praise, to all the ages of eternity.—Once more—Have we a taste for social pleasures, and are we smit with the love of a friend ? We shall here have the greatest variety to make choice of, from the highest archangel, down to the lowest saint. No sooner shall we enter these happy mansions,

sions, but the whole celestial company shall approach and bid us welcome, with the generous offers of their friendship and sincerest love; nor is there any danger of our friendship being interrupted by suspicions or false surmises, by treachery or any wicked art; for as the connexions of this kind in the other world, are not formed upon self-interest or party views, nor founded on weakness, or necessity, but are the genuine effect of that harmony of tempers which prevails among the members of that happy society, their friendships must last as long as their existence, and can never have a period but with eternity itself.— But to describe the pleasures of the superior regions, is an attempt too daring for any mortal to pretend to, since no eye has seen, nor any ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of any man to conceive the greatness of that happiness, which God has prepared for those who love and obey him: This much we know, that it is exceedingly, nay, inconceivably great; and what above all enhances their felicity, is, that they are sure, it shall never have an end.

Now these are the pleasures, and this the reward which God, who cannot lie, has promised as an encouragement to the practice of universal piety and virtue.—Let us therefore set this glorious prospect continually before us,

us, that we may never become languid or remiss in the performance of that work, which God has given us to do ; but animated at all times with the highest degrees of christian vigor and religious warmth, let us carefully and conscientiously discharge every branch of our christian duty, that by a patient continuance in well-doing, we may attain to glory, honor, and immortality, and become partakers of everlasting joy.

Nor does it in the least diminish the worth of our religious actions, that we are moved to them by the prospect of reward.—Whatever may be the case with us hereafter, by the present constitution of human nature, the passions of hope and fear, are the great springs of action among men : To these therefore, almighty God has been pleased to address himself in all his transactions with us ; and while we act upon these principles, we are so far from being mercenary in a criminal sense of the word, that this very principle is represented in Scripture, as the foundation of that astonishing virtue, which discovered itself so illustriously in the obedience and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we are told, that for the joy, or the reward that was set before him, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and is now set down on the Father's right hand, to give repentance
and

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and remission of sins to such as believe in his name.—And indeed, to be animated to the practice of our duty, by the view of a virtuous enjoyment, demonstrates the highest love to virtue, and is the very essence and perfection of a moral character.—Let us therefore, in compliance with the intention of heaven, keep our eye continually fixed upon this great and noble reward, that our desires being more and more enflamed with the view of it, we may exert every faculty of our souls, and all our powers of action, in the faithful discharge of the several offices of the christian life; knowing, that if we continue steadfast unto the end, we shall find to our experience, that our labour has not been in vain.

Now from what has been said, we may observe in the first place, that christianity is by no means such an easy business, as a great many would fondly persuade themselves:—It is represented by the Apostle, in the words of our text, as a work and labor; and indeed, those who enter upon it, will find it to be so in fact: To mortify our rebellious lusts, to subdue the corruption of our natures, to change our hearts and reform our lives, is a labor which requires the greatest vigilance, the nicest and most painful care, and calls for all the vigor and activity of the inward man.—We have involved ourselves by sin, in a most
unhappy

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unhappy and miserable situation; it is our business to extricate ourselves from it, in the best manner we can; God has pointed out the only possible means; if these are hard and difficult, and attended with pain or trouble, the blame must lie upon ourselves, and can by no means be ascribed to any severity on the part of God. And this will evidently appear to be the case, if we consider that he has promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, to enlighten their understandings, to renew their wills, to regulate their affections, to supply their weakness and want of strength, and to work in them both to will and to do, according to his good pleasure.— Let us therefore in the most earnest manner, apply to him by prayer, for the aids of the Holy Ghost, that our helper being almighty, we may become strong in the Lord, and be thoroughly furnished for every good work.

Secondly, From what has been said, we may likewise observe the infinite goodness and love of God to men, who to make that difficult and laborious work as easy as possible to us, has not only promised us his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities, but has annexed the highest rewards to the practice of our duty, and established such an inseparable connexion betwixt virtue and happiness, that it is impossible

possible for us to do the one, without advancing and promoting the other; he does not require of us to seek his face in vain, but has made it our interest as well as our duty to be good, and to do good; he has ordered things in such a manner, that we cannot take any one step, or make the least progress in the way of religion, without feeling ourselves the happier and the better for it:—And as if all this were not enough, he has promised us a happiness in heaven, the nature and extent of which we shall not be able fully to comprehend, till we come to be possessed of it in that blessed place, where no impure or unholy thing, shall ever be allowed to enter.—Let us then from these divine encouragements, be prevailed with to persevere in the practice of holiness and virtue; let us go straight forward in the way to glory, with courage and resolution, with zeal and intrepidity, without turning either to the right hand or to the left, till at last we appear perfect before God our Creator, and Christ our Redeemer, in Zion.—Let us be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, so far as we know that our labor neither is, nor shall be in vain in the Lord.

S E R M O N III.

HEBREWS, chap. x. ver. 38.

BUT IF ANY MAN DRAW BACK, MY SOUL
SHALL HAVE NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

THERE is not a more contemptible character in human life, than that of a changeable, fickle, and inconstant one: A man of this complexion can no more depend upon himself, than he can be depended on by those about him.—He seldom forms his judgments according to the nature and reason of things, but is governed by fancy, by whatever strikes his imagination, or falls in with his present passions; his resolutions are ever unsteady, his behavior disjointed and irregular, and what he does to-day, for the most part he undoes to-morrow.—He is constant in nothing but inconstancy, and one should no more know by his designs, what part he will really act, than he can be certain of the most precarious and contingent events in nature.—A temper of this kind, as it renders a man
useless

useless to all the purposes of society, to all the purposes of trust, confidence and friendship, is no less pernicious to the interest of the individual, by leading him to execute plans that are ill-digested, to stop short in the execution of them, to propose new ones, and to suffer these also to die away, before they are brought to their proper measures of perfection.—It is not my business at present, to enquire into the principles by which one may account for this strange weakness and irresolution of the human mind : It may be necessary however to observe, that where it enters into religious life, and has an influence upon the profession and practice of christianity, it is a temper of all others the most despicable and dangerous, hateful in itself, and fatally destructive in its consequences : It effectually prevents a man from seeing with his own eyes, and attending to the evidences of truth, and disposes him to give up his faith and practice with the implicate resignation of a slave, to the guidance and direction of others ; the last book he reads, or the last person he converses with, commands his sentiments ; and thus, unstable in all his ways, he is, in the elegant language of the apostle Paul, as a child tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness,

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whereby they lie in wait to deceive.—This languor and feebleness of heart, if we may be allowed to call it so, lays him open to every temptation, and naturally precipitates him into a breach of the most sacred and solemn engagements; every new difficulty gives a check to his resolutions, and every new motive disposes him to abandon that course of behavior which he had religiously determined to observe; by which means he loses the benefit of all the happy steps, he may have already made in the way of religion, and exposes himself to the high and dangerous displeasure of that God, who has declared in the words we have just now read, That if any man draws back, his soul shall have no pleasure in him.

We call ourselves christians; by attending the ordinances of the Gospel, we profess our faith in Christ and his religion: When we were baptized, we solemnly swore and engaged to govern ourselves by his laws, to follow his example, to depend upon his promises, and to continue faithful in his service even to the end of life: If we shall violate these engagements, through unbelief, or the commission, the wilful commission of any known sin; if we suffer ourselves to apostatize either from the faith or practice of christianity, we shall not only incur the odious character

ter of being false and perjured; but our guilt thus aggravated will unavoidably involve us in the severest effects of divine resentment and indignation.—By professing christianity, we profess to set our faces towards Zion; but this is not enough, we must go streight forward in the way to happiness, through the paths of righteousness and goodness, we must neither turn to the right hand nor the left, but with the most steady and vigorous resolution, should pursue our christian course, being sensible, that if in any instance we fall off, we forfeit the protection of heaven, and expose ourselves to the condemnation of back-sliders, whose apostacy will infallibly destroy them.—Our only security therefore lyes in our perseverance; and to engage us in the unshaken profession of christianity, and a faithful discharge of the several duties of it, allow me to explain in a few words, the nature, the causes, and the cure of religious apostacy, and when I have done this, I shall in place of application, point out a few of the dangerous and fatal effects of it.

I am in the first place to explain the nature of religious apostacy.—It supposes, that one has embraced christianity and made a profession of it, has been convinced by proper evidence, that it is a religion of truth, con-

taining a system of divine principles and precepts, worthy of God to reveal, and of man to believe and submit to, and that he has in consequence of this conviction, entered upon the practice of it, or at least publicly declared his resolution of doing so.—Now for one to alter his opinions, or change his sentiments, with regard to the truth of the christian religion, or the fundamental articles of it:—To throw off the obligation of its laws, and to live in a contemptuous violation of them, is, to be guilty of a most criminal apostacy.—The man therefore, who has taken upon himself the character of a christian, and bound himself in the terms of the Gospel Covenant, to the obedience of the laws of Christ, and afterwards suffers himself to be carried by the influence of his own sinful passions, or any other vicious inducement, into the corrupt ways and practices of the world, such an one is properly an apostate from Christ, and guilty of the most dangerous back-sliding.—From which it appears,

In the first place, that to alter one's opinions with regard to some of the lesser articles of the christian faith, such I mean as have no immediate or necessary connection with practice, cannot be properly charged with the hateful name of apostacy.—Speculative points of faith, are what wise and good men always

ways have, and always will differ about; and nothing is more common, or less criminal, than to find one and the same person in these matters differ from himself.—This is a necessary consequence of the present dark and ignorant state of the human mind; and till infallibility becomes one of the properties of the soul of man, such differences are absolutely unavoidable.—For while men employ their intellectual faculties in enquiring after truth, these not being always equally well disposed, that which appears clear and evident at one time, may be obscure and clouded at another; but if freedom of thought, or an impartial examination into the truth of things, be a duty incumbent upon every reasonable creature, so far as his reasonable powers can carry him, whatever is a necessary and unavoidable consequence of it, must needs be innocent.—So that to change his opinion, with respect to speculative articles of faith, is what a man can neither help many times, nor is indeed accountable for. But

In the second place, From what has been said, it appears, that to suffer our faith in the important and essential doctrines of christianity, such as have a tendency to improve the heart and reform the life to be shaken, or to become so much dead and languid, as to lose its practical influence, is a degree of apos-

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tacy of a very dangerous kind ; and yet this is a very common case.—There are many who call themselves christians, and would take it extremely ill to have this point of fact called in question : They profess to believe the several articles of the christian creed, when, besides their baptism, they can produce no claim to the christian character.—By neglecting to turn their thoughts frequently on the evidences of christianity, the arguments upon which they at first embraced it, come by degrees to lose themselves and disappear ; by which means, their faith being deprived of that foundation, which alone can support and maintain its vigour, naturally degenerates into what may be rather called a not-doubting, than any actual belief of it ; which state of the mind may well constitute a negative, but never can a positive faith ; and whatever a negative cause may do in numbers, it must be acknowledged, that in morality it can never produce any positive effect.—So that to allow our faith, in the important doctrines of the Gospel, to become spiritless and inactive, to suffer it to lose its practical influence on our hearts and lives, is a dangerous species of apostacy, and a very high crime in the sight of God.

In the third place, It will also appear from what has been said, that every known, wilful
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deviation from the laws of the Gospel, by one who has been or still continues to be a professor of it, is an act of religious apostacy, and exposes the guilty person to the displeasure of almighty God : I say, every known and wilful deviation from the laws of the Gospel ; because a good man through ignorance, through weakness, through inadvertency or surprize, may be unhappily betrayed into the commission of a crime, but if, upon recollection, he heartily disapproves of what he has done, is extremely sorry for it, asks forgiveness of God, and seriously resolves against it for the future, such a one cannot be justly branded with the odious name of an apostate : But he who deliberately gives in to the practice of any known sin, and feels no remorse upon reflection, as its likely he will repeat the same, whenever he has an opportunity, he is a back-slider from God, and the object of his high displeasure.

Lastly, As every particular deviation from the laws of the Gospel, is a species and degree of apostacy, so for a professed christian to throw off the obligations of his religion altogether, and to live as if the Gospel were no proper rule of life to him :—To pay no regard to the authority of Christ, and to behave as if he had never come under any engagements to him : This is the very height

and quintessence of the sin of apostacy, and if there is a sin unto death, as the apostle assures us there is, this seems to be it: Which is of so very heinous and aggravated a nature, that he dares not so much as advise us to pray for those who are guilty of it.

Having thus explained the nature of religious apostacy, it follows, that we inquire into the causes of it.

Now these are, in the first place, The natural depravity and corruption of the human heart.—It would not contribute to answer our present purpose to enquire, how far this corruption is original, or acquired: This much must be acknowledged, that there is a strange unhappy aptitude in the soul of man, from its earliest infancy, to receive wrong impressions, to exert irregular appetites, and to contract vicious and sinful habits.—These being at first introduced by the means of bad example, and a careless education, bend the soul by degrees as it were to one side, and give it such a violent perversion, that it is not without the greatest difficulty that it can be afterwards reduced and brought to rights.—And even when by serious recollection, by attending to the beauty and advantages of virtue, and the arguments suggested by the Gospel to make us wiser and better, we at last resolve upon a thorough reformation of
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our hearts and manners; we are no sooner off our guard, but the obstinate malignity of our nature returns, and with an over-bearing force carries down all before it: Thus a man in some soft and peaceable moments, when his passions not being inflamed with the presence of vicious objects, give him leave to think coolly and deliberately on what he is about, resolves to be religious, and to govern himself by the laws and maxims of christianity; his reason and judgment are convinced, that this is the better part, that the final conclusion of such a course, will be peace, joy, and everlasting happiness: Yet how soon! how very soon do these convictions give way to the superior influence of vicious habits and criminal affections; his best resolutions fall a sacrifice to the in-bred corruption of his heart; and in the strong expression of scripture,—With the dog he returns to the vomit, and with the sow to her wallowing in the mire.—Such is the commanding power of that inveterate depravity which our natures have contracted, that like an elastic body, it ever tends to its original direction; and thus, in many instances, prevents that steadiness and perseverance in the ways of God, which can only render our persons and performances truly acceptable to him. But

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In the second place, Another cause of religious apostacy, is, one's embracing a religion upon any other grounds than those of a rational evidence and conviction : Many there are who believe christianity, because it was the religion of their fathers, the religion of the country in which they were born, and because they have never heard it called in question by any of their neighbors around them ; they are christians for the same reasons, that they would have been Mahometans had they been born in Turkey ; or Heathens, had their nativity placed them in Japan.—The faith of such people not being built upon reason, the smallest shew or appearance of reason is sufficient to shake the foundations of it, and to bring them over to the side of infidelity.—Their belief is not able to withstand the force even of a fallacious argument, and they may with equal ease be argued out of their religion or confirmed in it.—If we take our religion upon trust, without being at proper pains to examine the evidences of it ; if our conviction arises from prejudice, interest or education, rather than impartial reasoning or solid argument, no wonder that contrary prejudices, a contrary interest, or a contrary education, get the better of it, and dispose us to betray our religion, by abandoning our first faith.—

It is very possible indeed, for a man to maintain and persevere in his religion, even a religion which he has taken up at a venture, while temporal advantages, the good opinion of the world, or other favorable circumstances, happen to be on the side of it; but no sooner do persecution or oppression for conscience sake present their ghastly forms, when such a religion will forthwith hide its head, and chuse to disappear.—Nor is this the fate of false religions only; christianity itself has often suffered in this manner; for having been embraced without evidence, and believed without reason, the professors of it have in many instances, to save their lives, renounced their religion, and like the apostle Peter of old, have shamefully denied the author of it with a curse.—Whereas the faith of those who have embraced christianity upon a rational enquiry and impartial examination, like a house built upon a rock, has been able to out-brave the storms of temptation, ridicule, false reasoning, persecution, death itself, and with a firmness and resolution, inferior only to the immutability of him who is the author of it, has disposed them to seal their testimony with their blood.

In the third place, As religion is a matter of choice, so it should be always the subject of a free, impartial, and deliberate one.—

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One's entering upon it with rashness and precipitancy, is often the unhappy cause of a most fatal apostacy and back-sliding from the ways of God.—Our great Redeemer himself has taught us the terms, upon which we can expect to be admitted among the number of his disciples: These we must needs study to be acquainted with; lest by being involved in difficulties before we are aware, our hearts be discouraged, our resolutions fail us, and we draw back from the engagements we have come under to the obedience of Jesus Christ. We are extremely apt, when we meet with any considerable ruffle or disappointment in the pursuit of vicious gratifications, to take up a sudden resolution of altering the whole frame and tenor of our behavior, and thus at once enter upon religion in the way of a pett, without considering the nature and importance of it, or the difficulties with which it is attended; so soon as these begin to be felt, and the affecting sense of the disappointment wears off, our virtuous resolutions languish, and we insensibly fall back into our original careless indulgence of every unreasonable desire.—Again, when we have been guilty of any notorious crime, and are afraid of the shameful consequences of it; when we labor under any dangerous distress, and fancy we see death approaching, with all his formidable

ble terrors, we naturally fly for protection to heaven, and for the sake of safety, solemnly promise to be religious and good for the future: Whereas, no sooner is the alarm over, and the dangerous consequences disappear, but we are ready to forget our engagements, and in fact mind them no more than it we had never come under them.—It is likewise no uncommon thing for persons, whose imaginations are warmed with a lively and striking representation of the excellency of virtue, and the odious deformity of vice, to vow a perpetual and constant attachment to the one, and an everlasting abhorrence of the other; but when this heat and fervor of the spirits subsides, and they begin to be sensible that the paths of religion are not quite so smooth and easy as at first they apprehended them to be, they naturally fall from their first love, and make a shameful ship-wreck of faith and of a good conscience.—So that our carelessness and want of attention to the advantages and disadvantages on both sides,—our neglecting, in the words of our Savior, to sit down and count the cost, before we enter upon the profession or practice of religion, is many times the unhappy cause of a dangerous and fatal apostacy.—But the further illustration of this point, shall be the subject of another discourse.

SERMON

S E R M O N IV.

HEBREWS, chap. x. ver. 38.

BUT IF ANY MAN DRAW BACK, MY SOUL
SHALL HAVE NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

IN the former discourse, I endeavored to explain the nature of religious apostacy, and to assign some of the causes of it. Those I took notice of were,

First, The natural depravity and corruption of the human heart.

Secondly, One's embracing a religion upon any other grounds, than those of a rational evidence and conviction.

Thirdly, As religion is a matter of choice, it should always be the subject of a free, impartial, and deliberate one.—One's entering upon it with rashness and precipitancy, is often the unhappy cause of a most fatal apostacy and back-sliding from the ways of God.

I am to observe, in the Fourth place, that another cause of it is, Our not entering upon the faith and practice of the Gospel, in a due dependance upon Gospel Grace, but trusting to
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our own resolutions, and confiding in our own sufficiency.—However men may boast of the strength of their natural powers, experience, which is the best guide to truth, abundantly shews the truth of what our Savior has declared,—That without him in the way of religion, we can do nothing.—Religion consists in doing those things which are well pleasing and acceptable to God: What these are, God himself can only declare, and unless he had condescended to reveal his will to us by Jesus Christ his son, we should have been altogether unacquainted with the religion of the Gospel, and absolute strangers to the practice of it.—But this is not all, even those who have the most thorough knowledge of the christian system, are not always the most careful to form their lives upon the model of it. The knowlege and practice of religion are things in their own nature extremely distinct one from another:—According to the sentiments of the apostle James, who declares, That though he had all knowlege, yet if he had not charity he was nothing.—Hence it is, that the eyes of our minds must not only be opened, to behold the wonderful things that are contained in the law of God, but our hearts must be softened, to feel the divine energy of them, and our powers of action strengthened and invigorated for the discharge
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of every part of our duty.—These are effects, which can only be brought about by the operation of the Grace of Christ, and through this strengthening us, we are told, that we shall be able to do all things.—Those therefore who enter upon the practice of religion, without a due regard to the aids and influence of the divine Spirit, are every moment exposed to the danger of back-sliding and apostacy from the ways of God.

I shall only observe further, in the last place, That spiritual pride, or an over-weening conceit of our superior religious worth, arising from a comparison of our own characters with those of others, is a temper of mind by which one is apt to be betrayed into a certain carelessness, in relation to any future progress he should be making in the paths of goodness and virtue.—This unhappy disposition naturally unbends the soul, so that it ceases to act with vigor, and thereby insensibly falls under the power of its original bias and corruption.—The christian life is a progressive one; if we do not advance and go forward in it, our inbred depravity will pull us back; so that they who think they stand most secure, are for the most part in the greatest hazard of falling; nor is any thing more agreeable to the measure of natural equity and justice, or more analogous to the ways of God, than to make
such

such persons sensible, by withdrawing from them his restraining grace, that they have really in themselves nothing to boast of, nothing but what they have received; God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

Now these are some of the causes of that religious apostacy, against which, God, the supreme judge of all, has positively declared,—That whoever is guilty of it, his soul can have no pleasure in him.—With what extreme caution therefore should we guard against this fatal and destructive evil: Is there no danger in displeasing the Almighty? Or can we think ourselves safe while Omnipotence is armed against us? If when we have come under the most solemn engagements to the faith and obedience of the Gospel, we should afterwards draw back, it must be to perdition; the nature and reason of things teach us so; God, who is truth itself, has declared it, and nothing he has said, shall ever fall to the ground.—It is our business therefore, as we regard our own interest, or the favor of the greatest and best of Beings, to endeavor to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: And if we would really wish to persevere unto the end, and be faithful unto death, the follow-

ing measures to prevent our backsliding, may perhaps deserve to be taken notice of.

In the first place: As the root of religious apostacy lies chiefly in the human heart, in the corruption and depravity of our natures, so this is what of all things we ought principally to be upon our guard against.—Whatever degree of corruption we may have derived from our first parents, we have greatly added to it by our numberless actual provocations.—This adventitious depravity, if we may be allowed to call it so, may be conquered and got the better of, by the same methods by which it was acquired.—We have unquestionably, in many cases, a power over our own thoughts. If we indulge vicious ones with pleasure, we immediately become transgressors; we must therefore bear down every thing of this kind, so soon as it appears in our minds; should without hesitation turn our thoughts to different objects, and endeavor to divert them by whatever is serious or entertaining from polluting our hearts, or begetting sinful inclinations in us: This is what, at least, we certainly can endeavor to do, and did we resolutely push these endeavors with a proper degree of application, our vicious sentiments and imaginations would, through the blessing of God, cease by degrees to trouble

trouble us, and would at last altogether vanish and disappear.—And with regard to the sinful habits we have contracted, which constitute no small part of the corruption of our natures, these must be unlearned, by religiously abstaining from whatever is evil, and a careful performance of every thing that is good; by avoiding these particular acts, which originally laid the foundation of them, and by devoting ourselves to the practice of the opposite virtues. Nor is even this the negative part of it, at least, without the compass of the human power.—Actions, which proceed from the most inveterate habits, are every day suspended from circumstances absolutely trifling and inconsiderable: Thus a man habitually addicted to the infamous, under-bred crime of profane cursing and swearing, will lay a bridle upon his tongue, rather than offend one whom he would wish to oblige; and a person whose heart is enflamed with the passions of anger, avarice, or lust, shall nevertheless be diverted from the execution of his sinful purposes, by the presence even of a child.—But one should think, that if it is in our power to abstain from sinful actions upon any one occasion, it is equally in our power to abstain from them on all occasions; by which method, we shall at last get the better of our vicious habits, and restore the mind to a capacity of receiving

ing these divine impressions, which form the new man, and make us like to God.—By this means therefore, should we endeavor to rectify the several disorders of our natures, subdue the force of every irregular appetite, habit and affection, and by the repeated exercise of piety, justice, temperance, charity and mercy, should create and strengthen all these virtuous dispositions, that are necessary to render our duty easy to us, and put us upon the practice of it with chearfulness and delight: Thus shall we be in some measure happily delivered from one great cause of religious apostacy, and be in so much the less hazard of backsliding from the ways of God.

In the second place, We should not only, by a serious attention to the evidences of Christianity, raise our minds to the highest possible degrees of faith in it, but should frequently review the arguments upon which we at first believed: By this means, our conviction of the truth of it, being always strong and vigorous, our faith shall be able to withstand the attempts of every one who would endeavor to seduce us, and bear us up against the influence of every plausible objection, delusive argument, or the more infectious example of well-bred infidelity.—And for this purpose, we should convince ourselves of the
Messiahship

Messiahship of Christ, from the accomplishment of prophecies in him; should persuade ourselves of the truth of his religion, from the heavenly nature of its principles and precepts; from the intrinsic divine energy of its doctrines upon the hearts and consciences of men; from the surprizing miraculous works performed by the author of it, for the good of mankind, and from the wonderful conversion both of Jews and Gentiles into the faith of his Gospel.—Did we thus seriously and frequently attend to the grounds and evidences of our religion, we should, through the blessing of God, be able to stand fast in the faith; our opinions would not be in hazard of being shaken by every wind of doctrine, or the cunning craftiness of men, who lie in wait to deceive; but being founded on the highest moral evidence, would remain rooted in the heart, and have a lasting influence upon the whole of our tempers and conversations.

In the third place, If we would wish to guard against apostacy, we must, previous to our entering upon religion, impartially and deliberately consider the nature and obligations of it, the difficulties which attend the practice thereof, and the many temptations and discouragements which may divert us from the path of duty: These, our blessed

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Savior has fairly laid before us, and it is our own fault, if we suffer ourselves to be surprized.—Many, we are told, are the troubles which afflict the just; if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution; persecution from his own lusts, from a wicked world around him, from the snares and devices of hell, and even from these dispensations of the divine providence, which are meant for the trial of his virtue, the establishment and encrease of his faith.—We must undertake a formidable warfare, not with flesh and blood, but with lusts and corruptions, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, and with spiritual wickednesses in high places.—We must lay our account with obloquy and reproach, with shame and contempt, with persecution and oppression for righteousness sake, and the testimony of a good conscience; these, the author of our religion has taught us, we must expect to meet with, that being aware of our danger, we may be properly prepared against it, and our souls being fortified by the most vigorous resolution, we may neither be surprized nor overcome by the various difficulties which cast up to us; but by a patient continuance in well-doing may seek for glory, honor, and immortality, and in the end obtain everlasting happiness and life.—If we would therefore
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wish to avoid the baneful crime of apostacy, before we take upon ourselves the profession of religion, we should sit down deliberately and count the cost, consider the several embarrassments we may meet with, the number and force of the enemies we have to contend against, and should put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to resist the wiles of the Devil, that we may be able to keep the faith without wavering, to maintain our integrity, and hold fast our religion and righteousness unto the end.

In the fourth place, It will likewise be of no small importance, frequently to call to mind the terms upon which the Gospel Salvation is promised to us ; it is not a few scattered, independent, disjointed acts of religion, that can give a title to an everlasting reward.—It is a prevailing regard to holiness, and an habitual attention to the rules of duty that almighty God requires, and will accept of, and none but those who continue faithful unto the death, can expect to obtain that crown of life that shall constitute them kings and priests unto God for ever and ever : The frequent consideration of which, will have a powerful tendency to dispose us, not to rest satisfied with any particular measure of religious acquisition or attainment ; it will preserve us from suspending our diligence upon a

mistaken notion of having done enough, and will make us always sensible of the absolute necessity of pressing forward towards the mark for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus; and of adding to our faith, virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, brotherly kindness and charity, that thus we may not only attain to the full stature of perfect men in Christ, but to that happy conformity with God, which is the supreme excellence of our natures, and the sovereign source of our highest happiness and enjoyment.

In the last place, If we would wish to persevere in the profession of our religion, and continue faithful in the practice of it to the last; we must live in a constant humble dependance upon the grace of Christ, and by fervent and serious prayer, endeavor to draw down from above, all those divine assistances that are necessary to encourage and strengthen us in the discharge of every part of our duty.—Almighty God has generously offered his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, to enlighten their understandings, to renew their wills, to supply their weakness and want of strength, and to enable them both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.—Let us therefore give ourselves up to the guardianship of this divine conductor, that our helper be-
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ing Almighty, we may become strong in the Lord, and thoroughly furnished for every good work.

Did we seriously attend to these things and practise them, they would make us that we should neither be barren nor unfruitful in the good ways of the Lord; they would preserve us from every fatal degree of apostacy, and save us from the effects of that dreadful declaration in the text,—If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.—A declaration sufficient to strike every sensible thinking mind, with the most awful apprehension and terror.—For if our happiness, nay, if our very being depends upon the good pleasure of God, can we fancy we can either live or be happy without him.—If we pay no real regard to the religion we profess to believe, or wilfully violate the most sacred laws of it, he has told us, we shall not only lose his favor, but incur his highest displeasure: And is it possible to conceive a loss equal to the one, or a misfortune greater than the other?—To forfeit the regard of him who made us, is, to throw ourselves out of his protection, to lose the benefit of all his attributes, of his wisdom that should guide us, of his power that should defend us, of his goodness that should supply our wants, and of all his promises which should comfort our hearts, and be the foundation

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foundation of all our wishes and of all our hopes.—We sink into a state desperately wretched and forlorn, in which being without God and without Christ, we dare not so much as lift our eyes to heaven, or expect deliverance in any trouble, from above.—While others can relieve themselves with trusting in God, we have no such all-powerful friend to go to; he who strengthens the hearts, and is the portion of his own people, will withdraw himself far from our complaints, he will laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh.—That same kind providence which protects his faithful servants, will take no concern in us, but we shall be left defenceless, to the power of our own wicked hearts, and thereby immediately commence unhappy.—Now can any thing be more egregiously wretched, than the man who is thus left and abandoned of God, cast out of his family, and deprived of his favor and protection? he lives in a fatherless state here, a prey to the Devil and his own lusts, and shall die without a friend at last, without a God or an Angel to receive his departing spirit: The very hills and mountains shall fly from his prayers, and refuse to cover him from the face of his angry judge, and the awful glory of his irresistible power.

But this is not all. We not only lose the friendship of the great Parent of the Universe,

verse, but by apostacy from the profession or practice of the truth, as it is in Jesus, we kindle up the fierceness of his wrath, and provoke his highest displeasure; and who knoweth the power of his anger? or who can stand before his indignation? When his fury is poured out like fire, the mountains are overturned, the rocks are thrown down, the hills melt, the earth is burnt at his presence, yea, the world and all that dwell therein: With an over-running flood, will he make an utter end of the place of the backslider, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.—What a fearful, what a dreadful thing is it to fall into the hands of an angry God? Are we able to disarm Omnipotence? are we stronger than he? Can we wrest the sword of justice out of his almighty arm, or turn aside the fury of his wrath?—When his anger begins to burn, the burthen of it is heavy; when his lips are full of indignation, his tongue is as a devouring fire; he will rain snares, fire and brimstone, even a burning tempest, upon the heads of his enemies, and this shall be the portion of their cup.—Think upon this therefore, ye who forsake and forget God, lest his anger be kindled against you, and he tear you in pieces, when there is none to deliver.—Ye may, indeed, possibly make a shift to pass your time at present with some kind of foolish ease and indifference, but the fatal period is approaching,

ing, when your disembodied souls shall be dragged to the tribunal of him who is the impartial judge of all the earth, where the terrors of the Lord will set themselves in dreadful array against you; and when you shall see that Savior whom ye now despise and neglect, coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, from whose nostrils shall ascend a smoky and devouring fire from his mouth, to scatter his enemies before him, and by whose irreversible sentence ye shall be condemned to blackness of darkness, to groan out a weary eternity, under the torments of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.—These, my brethren, are not the empty chimeras, the idle dreams of a gloomy or clouded imagination; they are truths supported by the same evidence which we have for any thing that relates to the other world.—Happy shall we be, if in the full faith and assurance of them, we make it our daily concern to fly from the wrath to come.—For this purpose, let us be always mindful of our religious profession and obligations, that we may persevere in them with faithfulness unto the end;—Let us be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, being persuaded, that if any man draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in him.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V.

GALATIANS, chap. v. ver. i.

STAND FAST THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE.

SUCH is the amazing influence of habit and education, that through these, men will at last come to be reconciled to a discipline of the severest kind, and to reckon a change in their circumstances, though ever so much to the better, a real unhappiness and disadvantage. We have a pregnant instance of the truth of this, in the behavior of those Jews who embraced Christianity; being strangers to the liberty of this new dispensation, and having no taste for the enjoyments of a rational freedom, they attempted to introduce the Laws of Moses into the institution of Jesus Christ, and would thus have entailed a perpetual servitude upon the christian church.—It was in opposition to these judaizing christians, that the apostle Paul wrote

wrote this epistle ; in which, he seems to be greatly surprized, that the Galatians should shew themselves so very insensible to the charms of liberty, as to be willing to submit to that load of ceremonies, which must necessarily have rendered their lives one continued scene of slavery and religious oppression.—I marvel, says he, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, into another Gospel : O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth ? are ye so foolish ? having begun in the spirit, are ye made perfect in the flesh ?—He compares their condition under the Law, to that of an heir under age, in subjection to tutors and governors ; but now that they had embraced the religion of Jesus, they were no longer under the Law, but under Christ ; they were no more servants and children, but heirs of God, and joint-heirs with his Son ; he therefore re-proves them with a good deal of severity, for discovering so strong a disposition to be again in bondage to these weak and beggarly elements, and to observe days, and months, and times, and years :—I am afraid of you, says he, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.—He tells them, that by such an abject temper of mind they proved themselves unworthy of the character they possessed ;—Ye
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are no longer children of the bond-woman, but of the free.—And therefore he exhorts them to show themselves men, to make it appear that they were conscious of their own freedom, and sensible of the advantages that result from it, by a strenuous maintaining of that liberty which they enjoyed in virtue of their christian profession, and by standing out against all the attempts of these Christian Jews, who might endeavor to deprive them of it.—Stand fast, says he, in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

One would think, that whatever occasion there might be for an advice of this kind to the Jews of old, there should be very little use for it, now that Christianity is better understood, and the world, for a considerable course of time, have had a taste of that freedom, which as the disciples of Jesus they are entitled to partake of. In the mean time, however sensible the generality of men may be of every encroachment that is made, or attempted to be made, upon their civil privileges, there are a great many in fact who can tamely submit to have those of a religious kind wrested out of their hands.—There is a certain kind of indolence inherent in the most part of tempers, which naturally disposes them to avoid every thing that might give them any trouble or disturbance.—The exercise

cise of the understanding in its enquiries into truth, being accompanied with too much pain and application, readily leads men to a blind obedience and implicit faith; and as it is impossible this weakness in the human constitution, should escape the observation of those who are fond of power, it has laid a foundation for all the impositions of priest-craft, and made way for establishing a spiritual dominion over the consciences of men.—Our blessed Savior, being sufficiently aware of this, not only put the world upon their guard, but after having delivered them from the usurpations of superstition, and asserted the rights of private judgment, he left it upon his followers as a religious obligation, to act up to the favors he had done them, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith he had made them free.—So that the duty is universally binding upon Christians of all denominations; and perhaps it is no less necessary to be inculcated in the present age, than it was in the days of the apostles, the same tendencies in the human constitution being equally strong now as they were then.

In the mean time, it must be observed, That it happens in this, as well as in every other thing that admits of it, that people are very apt to run into extremes.—While some, under a pretence of their christian liberty, endeavor

endeavor to shake themselves loose of all religious restraints whatsoever; others submit to institutions of a human invention, which, it may be, have neither reason nor religion to recommend them.—A very little knowledge of the world will easily convince us, that some persons are so madly devoted to the gratification of their vicious appetites, that to avoid the reproaches of an offended conscience, they force themselves into a fond belief of the disinterested and unlimited goodness of the Deity, and persuade themselves, that while they only act from the principles of their constitution, they are in no hazard of forfeiting the divine favor.—They represent the supreme Being to themselves under the character of one, who, as he has no interest depending upon their good or bad behavior, is by the necessary benevolence of his nature, always disposed to overlook the mistakes of his rational creatures, and take no notice of these criminal pursuits, which the blindness of their understandings, or the force of their impetuous desires, lead them unavoidably into; and by an unnatural construction of those passages of Scripture which point out the divine mercy and compassion, fancy they are at freedom to do whatever is most agreeable to themselves: As if almighty God had, under the christian dispensation, divested himself of the moral

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government of the world, and put a perpetual end to all the distinctions betwixt good and evil, right and wrong; as if the notices of his will, whereby he has declared his hatred to vice, and his resolution to punish the workers of iniquity, were mere grimace, and intended only to try how far the credulity of men would carry them.—Whereas it must needs be evident to every one, who allows himself to observe the consequences of actions, that the great Author of nature has established an inseparable connexion betwixt sin and misery, vice and unhappiness; and whether these natural evils be considered under the notion of punishments for the sins that are past, or motives to determine us to avoid the practice of them for the future, they lay a foundation in reason to conclude, that the supreme Being not only interposes in the government of the world, but that his government is of a moral nature; that actions of real worth, such as honesty, integrity, faith, friendship and honor, are always agreeable to him; whereas a behavior of a different kind exposes the person who is guilty of it, to the highest instances of his displeasure and resentment.—So that for men to presume upon the divine clemency, and to indulge themselves in sin, from a persuasion that the goodness of God will dispose him to over-look it, or, in the

the words of the apostle, to sin because grace does abound, is plainly to act in direct contradiction to the strongest appearances, to the very nature of God himself, to the obvious tendencies of action, and to the inviolable relations which things naturally and necessarily stand in one to another.—Agreeably to this we find, the christian religion is so far from being designed to deliver men from the reasonable restraints of virtue, that in this dispensation the wrath of God is in a more peculiar manner revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, and the divine goodness is always represented to consist, not so much in producing happiness, as in making the good, the virtuous, the honest man happy.—So that to follow the course of one's extravagant appetites, and pay obedience to their commands, is, to exceed the bounds of that liberty which religion has afforded us, to abuse the mercies of heaven, and turn his grace into licentiousness.

It is no less absurd and unreasonable to imagine, that Christianity has freed us from the strictest obligations to virtue, by substituting something else in the room of it, and accepting an obedience to a few positive institutions as an equivalent for a moral character, and an atonement for the breaches we commit upon the laws of eternal righteousness

and truth.—The religion of the Son of God, far from affording any manner of encouragement to vice, has not only carried morality to the highest degrees of perfection, but has instituted the most proper means to raise our natures to a conformity with the moral excellencies of our Creator, and placed the whole value and importance of them in their tendency to bring about this glorious and happy effect. As this is the principal design of every positive law; for one to take up with it, or fancy that it will justify him in the neglect of the great end of religion, is the same as to cover one's self with a fig-leaf, which the first breath of wind will be sure to blow away, and leave him exposed to the violence and fury of every approaching storm.—In the mean time, whatever absurdity may be in this, there are a great many people who take it to be the truth of the case in fact; and while they pursue the gratification of their vicious passions, think they shall be able to compound and make up matters with heaven, by some kind of a serious regard to what may be called the appendages and out-works of religion. Thus orthodoxy in the faith is made to atone for a multitude of faults; and a devout participation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is thought to give one a claim to an indemnity for the sins of his past life; the
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most atrocious crimes are judged expiable by the course of a regular penance; and a journey to Mecca, Jerusalem, or perhaps to Rome, will not only quiet their consciences for the present, but, according to their way of thinking, will entitle them to a freedom of acting agreeably to their own inclinations in all time coming.—Now, whoever considers the nature of Christianity, as it is taught by Christ Jesus himself, will easily be convinced that a persuasion of this kind is directly contrary to the genius and complexion of the Gospel, as it lays a foundation for all manner of extravagance and licentiousness, and is a scheme palmed upon the understanding by means of the passions, with design to command a blind approbation of these irregular courses, which upon sober and serious thinking, a wise man would take care to avoid.—For it is manifestly evident, that the christian religion is so far from proposing any expedients for our encouragement in sin, that all its precepts are expressly calculated to make men virtuous and good. The promises and threatenings of it are intended for the same purpose, and whatever else it contains is represented by Christ himself, under the notion of means to make them more truly religious.—So that to substitute a few ritual observances, in room of the virtues of a good life, and to

fancy that a regard to the one, will justify us in the neglect of the other, is, a plain subversion of the design of Christianity, and a mistake equally dangerous in itself, and inconsistent with the very nature of that freedom which is offered to mankind under the dispensation of the Gospel of Christ.

In the mean time, this is not the only excess that men are apt to run into; there is an extreme upon the other hand, and the precept has certainly a meaning in it, which enjoins us not to be righteous over much.—However wretchedly slavish the disposition may be thought to be, there are a great many who, like beasts of burthen, will tamely submit to the oppressions of human authority, and pay a religious obedience to the most extravagant decrees of that church of which they happen to be members: They add to the commandments of God, those of fallible and interested men; and whatever regard they may have to the one, they are sure to entertain the profoundest veneration for the other; by which means, they not only put the laws of God and their fellow-men upon a level, but throw back their christian liberty, the most valuable gift of heaven, with contempt upon their generous benefactor.—Now, as this is an absurdity which a great many persons who are otherways well enough disposed, are very ready

ready to fall into, it may perhaps be of some use to enquire a little into the nature of that liberty which the disciples of the Son of God are entitled to partake of, by virtue of their christian profession.—And to those who observe the matter with any degree of attention, it will appear, in the

First place, That by means of Christianity we are freed from all the obligations of the ceremonial law. This seems to have been a point determined by the unanimous voice of the Apostles and Elders met in the first General Council at Jerusalem, and supported by the authority of the Holy Ghost, Acts xv. 28. It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burthen than these necessary things,—things necessary in the then circumstances of the Christian Church,—that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.—And altho' the Christian Jews, even after this, discovered a most violent attachment to the religion of Moses, and always insisted upon the necessity of circumcision, and the other rites of that antiquated constitution, yet the great Saint Paul, the famous Apostle of the Gentiles, was so far from giving up with what had been already decided, that with the utmost bravery and resolution, and in the midst of dangers

and even death itself, he maintained the glorious cause of liberty, and asserted the absolute immunity of Christians from these legal observances, which were a bondage that neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear: Nay, and the opposition he met with upon this account was so far from discouraging him, that it not only gave him an opportunity of expressing in the warmest manner the useflessness and insignificancy of all these Mosaical institutions, but provoked him to give them such epithets and designations, as made it evidently appear that they were never designed to be regarded as any part of the Gospel of Christ.—Thus we find him representing them under the notion of carnal commandments, beggarly elements, laws that were not good.—And so much was he afraid, that the stiffness and obstinacy of the Jews might entail a perpetual servitude upon the Christian Church, that he made it the principal design of some of his epistles to put this matter in the clearest light; to shew that that Law could never make any man perfect; that while they were under it, they were in the case of pupils or servants; but now that a more rational and manly dispensation had taken place, he commands them, by virtue of his apostolical authority, to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.

And

And as Christ Jesus has relieved us from that yoke and bondage of ceremonies which obtained under the oeconomy of Moses, so he has given us a religion that is plain and simple and unmixt, destitute of all ceremony and external grandeur, and is so far from recommending corporeal holiness, or a bodily devotion, that it resides chiefly in the mind, and demonstrates itself by such actions only as principles of a rational or spiritual nature are calculated to produce.—Nor is it to be imagined that almighty God would give us a religion thus simple and unadorned, that he might leave it to the ambition of designing men to impose upon the folly of weak ones a fresh load of rituals, and interpose their authority in these cases where he has been pleased to leave us to an absolute freedom: This, as one very well expresses it, would be for the Almighty to be merciful in vain, for the Creator to resign his power to the creature, and for God to recall his own injunctions, which he once gave for a gracious and wise end, that men might enforce theirs for a weak or a wicked one.—Nothing is, or can be pure religion, but either what God commands, and tells us he will accept, or what is dictated by reason, which is the law of nature; and whatever is super-added, however dignified by a venerable name, is no part of true religion,

gion, which consists in the love of God and our Neighbor, and in the use of such means as are necessary for promoting these divine dispositions. Nor are these means left to be determined by the fruitful, the luxuriant fancies of crafty and designing men, but are expressly ascertained by Jesus Christ himself, who has taught us every thing that is good, and every thing that God requireth of us.— So that whatever is introduced by mere church authority, under the notion of decency and order, or becoming ceremonies in the service of God, are manifest encroachments upon our christian freedom; and with whatever zeal or vehemence they may be urged, our compliance is a mean and scandalous betraying of that liberty wherewith Jesus Christ hath made us free —And we ought the rather to stand fast in this christian freedom, that experience teaches us, that where one ceremony is introduced, for whatever reason, pretences will be always found for introducing another, till at last, religion shall lose its native purity and simplicity altogether, and become an huge overgrown body, unnaturally swelled up with the fond inventions of men: Witness the Church of Rome, where the original features of Christianity are so effectually disguised with the pageantry of external ceremonies, and the pompous parade
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of an outward devotion, that one who was a stranger to a farce of that kind, would scarce be apt to mistake the religion of a Romish cathedral for the religion of the Son of God. It is very probable indeed, that ceremonies might have been at first introduced into the worship of God, to fix our thoughts, to enliven our spirits, and thereby to help our devotion; but the experience of a great many ages has abundantly shewn us, that these its pretended friends have proven in fact its real and most successful enemies; and that a zeal for what is reckoned decent and becoming, has quite drunk up the very truth and vitals of religion.—I know the invention of ceremonies, in religious worship, is commonly justified by that passage in the Epistle to the Corinthians, where the Apostle commands, that all things be done decently and in order; the meaning whereof can be nothing else, but that Christians ought carefully to avoid disorder and confusion in their religious assemblies; that different acts of worship should not be blended or confounded with one another; that one should not pray, while another exhorted, and perhaps a third was singing psalms. But to pretend, that by these words the spiritual guides of the Church of Rome are empowered to contrive a legion of idle ceremonies, and prescribe a certain general manner

manner and form of worship to all of their communion, and oblige them to conform themselves thereto, under the penalty of the severest ecclesiastical censures, would be to give them a power, not only over the consciences, but the very constitutions of men. For as every person is bound to use such measures in the service of his Creator, as he finds by experience have the most effectual tendency to raise his soul to the highest warmth of devotion; and as every man is the only competent judge for himself, in a matter of that kind; so for another to tie him down, by virtue of his pretended spiritual authority, to the observation of certain modes and ceremonies in the worship of the Deity, which perhaps are altogether useless, or even inconvenient for one of his temper and constitution, would only serve to make him lifeless and formal in the exercises of religion, and is no more warranted by that passage of the apostle Paul, than it is founded in the nature and reason of the thing itself.—Accordingly, if we look into the fourteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, we shall find that the Apostle, far from intending to invest the governors of the Christian Church with such an unlimited authority, designs only to correct some abuses which had been introduced into their religious assemblies, and
directs

directs Christians in general to avoid every thing that might create disorder and confusion in their public meetings. Thus in the twenty-sixth verse,—How is it, brethren? says he; when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done to edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at most by three, and that not all together, but in course one after another; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the Church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.—And concludes with the fortieth verse of the chapter, by directing that all things be done decently and in order.—Nor indeed does it appear, that the primitive Christians understood the Apostle's meaning in a different sense; for we do not find that immediately upon reading this epistle, the Corinthians thought themselves bound to worship God by the means of bowings and scrapings, and a thousand senseless ceremonies, which, though they may serve to flatter the pride of vain, foolish, self-conceited mortals, can never with any propriety enter into the service of him who has told us, that he will be worshipped in spirit and in truth. No, these are the invention of later ages, when ignorance came to be established by a law,

law, and the true genuine Gospel of the Son of God was judged too naked and unadorned to be exposed to the eyes of the vulgar.—Ceremonies and superstition are so very incompatible with the religion of Jesus Christ, that the one is always found to gain ground, in proportion as the other loses it; and it is among the very last things that should enter into one's thoughts, that he who so well understood the true interests of reason and virtue, would either by himself or others introduce an establishment so manifestly inconsistent both with the one and the other.—A freedom therefore from the yoke and bondage of ceremonies of every kind, is one branch of that Christian Liberty wherewith our blessed Savior hath made us free

S E R M O N VI.

GALATIANS, chap. v. ver. I.

STAND FAST THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE.

IN discoursing from these words, I proposed to enquire a little into the nature of that liberty which the disciples of the Son of God are entitled to partake of, by virtue of their Christian profession. When I observed, in the first place, That by means of Christianity, we are freed from all the obligations of the ceremonial law, and from every ceremony of every kind that has not the visible stamp of divine authority, to give it its proper efficacy and value. The religion of the Gospel is pure, simple and unmixt; and to add to it the dreams and inventions of men, is to make it another Gospel, which whoever presumes to inculcate or impose, ought to be to us an anathema and maranatha. But,

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In the second place, Christianity hath freed us from that dominion and authority which any man, or any set of men, may pretend to exercise over the consciences of their fellow-creatures.—Jesus called his disciples to him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Matth. xx. 25, 26, 27.—Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren: And call no man your Father upon earth; for one is your Father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called Masters, for one is your Master, even Christ. Matth. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. By which it appears, that Christ Jesus will not only have his disciples to disclaim all manner of religious authority over one another, but the very name of it, and every thing else that might induce them to lord it over God's heritage: In consequence of which, the apostle Peter, in his address to the Ministers and Elders of the Church, 1 Peter v. 2. exhorts them to feed the flock of God, which was among them, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.—And indeed, nothing can be more absurd and unreasonable, than for those who were sent to minister unto the world, to pretend to become the masters of it, and instead of teaching others in the spirit of meekness, to put on the airs of authority, and claim that submission and implicate obedience, which is only due to the infallible dictates of the Holy Spirit of God.—It is true, the Church of Christ, as all other public societies, must needs have different orders of men in it; accordingly, we find our blessed Savior has appointed, some to teach, and others to be taught; and although those of the first rank are empowered to use the means instituted by Jesus Christ, for promoting the interests of virtue and religion, such as inflicting ecclesiastical censures, and excluding from the Christian society those, who by their principles and behavior prove themselves unworthy of the Christian character; yet this does by no means give them authority to prescribe any terms of salvation, or lay upon the shoulders of Christians any other burthens besides what are already enjoined by Christ Jesus himself.—For if they had a right to establish any new conditions of acceptance, they might by a parity of reason, pretend to an equal au-

thority, in cancelling and abrogating those which are already appointed; in which case, instead of applying to that revelation which Christ has given us of the will of God, for the rule and measure of our duty, we should be obliged to have recourse to men fallible like ourselves, and depend intirely upon them, for the knowlege of what is necessary to render the Deity propitious to us; and thus, by discarding the sacred oracles of truth, we should not only defeat the design of the propheticall office of Christ, but be reduced to a state of the most wretched uncertainty, as to what might be agreeable or disagreeable to our Maker: For as men are apt to entertain very different sentiments upon this head; nay, and as one and the same person is frequently found to differ from himself; so those who submit to be governed by human authority in matters of religion, must upon many occasions be unavoidably led to some of the most irregular, disjointed and self-contradictory practices.—Whereas, if the Word of God, contained in the sacred Scriptures, be a sufficient rule of faith and manners, as every one will readily acknowledge who allows himself to attend to the numberless gross absurdities which follow on the contrary supposition; it is plain, the business of a Gospel Ministry is not to command, but to instruct,

not to lay down any new terms of acceptance, but to explain, inculcate, and inforce those which are already established. Nor has a Minister of the Gospel, whatever be his rank and station in the Christian Church, whatever his character for integrity, learning, and discretion, any power to command obedience, even to the laws of Christ, upon his own authority; but as he has to do with reasonable creatures, is necessarily bound to take the most proper measures for convincing their judgments, that what he teaches is agreeable to the will of God; in which case, the obligations to obedience arise from the divine authority; and to submit to any thing in the way of religion, that has not this all-powerful stamp upon it, is, in so far, to give up that liberty wherewith Jesus Christ has made us free.—And as Christianity has delivered us from the authority and dominion of men over conscience, so on the other hand,

In the third place, It has ascertained to us a liberty of thinking and judging for ourselves; and made it an indispensable duty in all those things which concern our everlasting happiness.—Why even of your own selves, says our Savior, judge ye not what is right? Luke xii. 57. And in the first Epistle of John and fourth chapter, the Apostle enjoins Christians, not to believe every Spirit, but

try the Spirits whether they are of God ; and the reason he gives for it, is, that many false prophets are already gone out into the world. And indeed, the want of a candid and impartial inquiry into truth, or in other words, our refusing to obey the great Author of our religion in this particular article of duty, has not only been the occasion of a great many unhappy rents and divisions in the Christian Church, but has almost banished true religion from the earth.—It is always observed, that those who take their opinions upon trust, are of all others the most stiff and unmanageable in them ; their faith not being founded upon principles of reason, the most glaring light that can be held up to them can make no impressions upon that voluntary blindness which their intellectual faculties have contracted, through want of exercise and employment, so that it is absolutely in vain to pretend to argue them into a more just or reasonable way of thinking ; and the same motives which determined them to join with this or that religious sect or party, will at the same time lead them to hate and persecute those who differ from them ; for as they have no feelings of a rational conviction in their own breasts, they have no conception of the possibility of others being under any such influences ; and are therefore
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apt to imagine, that any opposition they meet with arises from prejudice and wild humor, and thereupon give in to the unnatural methods of violence and oppression; a blind zeal being ever found to be the most pernicious and destructive.—Whereas the man who enquires impartially after truth, will be so much sensible of the difficulties which lie in the way of the discovery of it, that instead of being positive or dogmatic upon any point, he will not only lay himself open to farther information, but think himself extremely much obliged to those who afford him the most proper means of being undeceived; and will be so far from entertaining an injurious opinion of others, for differing from him in their notions and sentiments of things, that he will always behave to them with meekness, forbearance, and brotherly affection; for as it is impossible that every thing should appear in the same point of light to all understandings, so where real free-thinking, or an impartial examination takes place, infinite differences in opinion are absolutely unavoidable, which every fair and unbiassed mind being very sensible of, those who are so, will cheerfully allow others that same freedom which they take to themselves.—Nor is it indeed an objection against this Christian Liberty, that it terminates in endless disputes and contro-

versies, and produces a chaos of wild and extravagant opinions; for these would be so far from wounding the body of Christ, that were the principle from which they flow but under proper management and direction, it would go far to bring about such a harmony among Christians both in sentiment and affection, as would be the peculiar glory of the christian character, and do the highest service to the cause of virtue.—We have daily instances of persons differing upon points of history, law, physic, or philosophy, with the greatest decency and good manners, without having their passions enflamed, or their hatred excited one against another; and why the case should not be the same in things that concern religion, is not quite so easy to be comprehended: For as every man is to stand or fall to his own master, we have no greater reason to be offended with others, than they have to be so with us. And as it is very possible that people may differ from one another, even in points of religion, without any alienation of heart or affections; so a free and unrestrained enquiry, seems to be the only proper method of promoting the interests of truth and virtue.—The just foundation upon which philosophy has at last come to be placed, is intirely owing to the freedoms that have been used with the different systems of it;

it; and it would perhaps have been a circumstance no less favourable to Christianity, had men allowed themselves to enquire impartially into the various articles of their faith, and exposed the numberless fooleries which have obtruded themselves upon the world under the venerable name of religion. This much is certain, that the monstrous fabric of error and superstition, which has so long supported itself in the Church of Rome, owes its being and preservation to the embargo that has been laid upon the thinking faculties of the human mind: And had not our glorious Reformers looked a little deeper into sacred things than their spiritual guides inclined to have allowed them, we should have been for ever strangers to these blessed days of truth and liberty we now happily enjoy.—I know likewise it is urged against this christian liberty, that whatever bustle may be made about it, the generality of men are in fact very unfit to examine and judge for themselves: They understand not the original language of Scripture, the phraseology, the tropes and figures of it, nor the antient customs, to which there are several allusions; they know nothing of the history of the primitive church, the acts and decrees of councils, nor can they comprehend the true state of many questions which concern the christian faith.—But to obviate this

objection, it is easy to observe, what all Christians seem to be agreed in, that every thing that is absolutely necessary to the happiness of mankind, is revealed to the level of the meanest capacities, and in all these they are to judge as well as they can: Whereas in those points of religion that are quite above them, if there really are any such, they are not called to judge at all, so far at least, and wherein they are above them.—Besides, if they cannot judge for themselves, who is to guide them? It will not be said, they must follow every one that pretends to be their leader: Whom must they follow then? Since they are not qualified to judge for themselves, how can they be supposed qualified to judge who must judge for them?—They must be capable to judge of the learning and faithfulness of those persons whom they chuse to direct them; but neither are they capable of this, more than of those things they want to be directed in.—So that there remains nothing, but that they judge for themselves in the best manner they can, and when they have done so, they have done all that God requires of them.—Nor is it just, what some people are apt to assert, that the practice of this duty serves to exalt reason above its sphere; for we are not surely to embrace a religion, without judging of it at all; and if
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we are to judge of it, it must be by such faculties as we have.—Almighty God condescends to appeal to our reason in all his transactions with us; this is the very medium by which he conveys his will; and indeed, where reason, or a capacity to understand it, is wanting, he does not expect we should receive the revelation at all, for that would be the same as to oblige us to see without an eye.—Not that reason is our rule, but only the discerners of it—Besides, if reason be so weak, as we are not able to judge for ourselves; how come we to pretend to judge for others? Nor can we ever be obliged to renounce our own blind and carnal reason, to follow, for any thing we know, the equally blind and carnal reason of other men.—So that however incompatible the exercise of this duty may be, with the indolence of some men, or the ambitious views of others, who incline to keep the world in darkness, that an implicit faith may be the more readily given to their own dictates and authority; it is nevertheless a duty indispensibly binding upon all reasonable creatures, expressly enjoined by Christ Jesus himself, and without which they may believe in men, but can never be properly said to believe in God:—They may be orthodox, but it is only at second hand; and their religion, like the sepulchres of the Scribes

Scribes and Pharisees, may be fair and showy without, when in the mean time wanting a solid foundation, and having no just connection of parts, it is absolutely without force and without merit.

Upon the whole, since Christ has, in great goodness to mankind, happily freed us by his religion from the slavish embarrassments of the Jewish law, and from every thing else that is inconsistent with the common rights and privileges of human nature; and since almighty God has assigned us our lot in a place where we have access to enjoy that liberty which our Savior has afforded us, in the full measure and extent of it; we ought certainly to show by our conduct, what a strong sense we have of so great and invaluable a blessing. What an inconceivable happiness is it to us, that we are delivered from the darkness of popery, and the dominion of priests; that we have recovered the liberty of using our own understandings, and are allowed to see with our own eyes; that we are at freedom to worship God according to our consciences, without being tied down to the rules of a blind obedience, or a blinder faith. Thanks be to that kind and indulgent Providence, which has thus set us free from the horrid impositions of priest-craft, and sent light and liberty into our land; that has put an end to
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the tyranny of men over the consciences of their fellow-creatures, and given us a taste of those glorious privileges which belong to the sons of God.—Let us therefore, in testimony of our gratitude, take care not to abuse our Christian liberty, or pervert it to such purposes as the author of it never intended:—But with a becoming sense of the obligations we lie under to our generous benefactor, let us endeavor to maintain and stand fast in the freedom he has given us, and make no encroachments upon that of others.—Nothing can more effectually defeat the success of the Gospel, or bring more contempt upon the teachers of it, than to see those whose business it is to make men virtuous, labouring to make them slaves, and to promote their own base and sinister designs, their worldly grandeur, or their lust of power, grasping at authority, and pretending to controul the consciences of those with whom they have to do.—Whereas a behavior that is easy and unassuming, modest and affable, and that betrays nothing of a lordly domineering temper, is the only mean to beget confidence and trust, to remove jealousy and suspicion of every kind, and command a proper attention and regard to what they have to say.—Let such therefore demonstrate by their actions, that they have nothing so much at heart as
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the honor of their Lord and Master, and the well-being and happiness of his people; that they seek not their own interest, but the interests of truth and virtue:—Then shall Zion indeed become a quiet and peaceable habitation, the walls of Jerusalem shall be salvation, and praise shall be heard in her gates.

What has been said may likewise serve to shew the absurdity and unreasonableness of persecution for the sake of conscience.—Every man having a right to judge for himself, no other man can pretend to a right of judging for him:—So that to persecute one into the faith, or in other words to force him to profess to believe contrary to the sentiments and conviction of his own mind, is, to deprive him of one of his most valuable privileges; and what, if it were our own case, we should be apt loudly to complain of, as an unnatural and unchristian oppression.—It is true indeed, where errors are accompanied with consequences, pernicious to the peace and welfare of civil and religious establishments, the most proper measures must be fallen upon to prevent the bad effects of them: But in every other case, we ought to satisfy ourselves with the more convincing methods of reason and argument, in order to bring them to what we imagine a more just and exact way of thinking; and when these are not effectual, we must

must leave them to themselves and to God; always holding fast this indisputable conclusion, that others have an equal right to differ from us, as we have to differ from them.

In fine, as we would not wish to encroach upon the freedom of others, so we should take care to maintain our own, and stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free: Considering at the same time, that we have been called unto liberty, not that we might use it as an occasion to the flesh to gratify the lusts thereof, but that we may serve one another in love, promoting one another's mutual interest and advantage; that by advancing the honor of Christ here, we may be at last admitted to the participation of his happiness and joy: To which may God of his infinite goodness bring us in due time. And to God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, be ascribed as is due all honor, power, and dominion, for ever. Amen.

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S E R M O N VII.

MATTHEW, chap. xvi. ver. 24.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
 IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME,
 LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE
 UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.

TO come after Christ, is to be his disciple: To be his disciple, is to be a Christian; and what the character of a Christian is, the words we have just now read point out to us in the most plain and explicit terms; but the terms, however plain and explicit, have been often grossly misunderstood.—The character of a Christian, and his title to the christian salvation, have been frequently thought to depend upon the operation of others, or such acts of our own as are so far from being virtuous, that they are sometimes criminal, and for the most part arrogantly presumptuous.—While some people have fancied that Baptism, which is the act of others, and in which we are generally passive, confers a right to the character and
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privileges of a Christian; others rest satisfied with the actings of what they call an appropriating faith, by which they persuade themselves that Christ Jesus will certainly save them, though they live in the habitual neglect of every thing upon which he has suspended the Christian's happiness and felicity.—These, it must be allowed, are very dangerous mistakes. But, thanks be unto God, we have not so learned Christ. It is the author of our salvation himself who hath taught us, that if we would be real Christians, and have a right to the blessings of the Gospel, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.

Had we had no original or actual guilt to answer for; had we kept the laws of God perfectly and inviolably from the time we came into being, we should have had a claim in point of justice to a sufficient and suitable reward: But the case being quite otherwise, having contracted an immense load of guilt, and our best services being attended with many criminal defects, we can have no hopes of salvation but in the fountain of divine mercy, which fountain we are told is opened up to us, by the attonement and intercession of our Redeemer.—At the same time this mercy, which he has freely purchased for us, he has promised only upon terms, which if
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we are not careful conscientiously to perform, all our faith and all our hope will be most miserably frustrated and disappointed.

The words I have just now read, do not lead us to consider what Christ has done for us, but what he requires us to do for ourselves. The former of these, I am sensible, is the favorite topic with the bulk of professing Christians: But the nature of religion, truth itself, and the great interest of immortal souls, require that this last should be principally insisted on, by those who are the public teachers of the Gospel.—Let us therefore fix our thoughts a little upon the christian character and temper, and learn from Christ himself the duties he requires of those who profess to be his followers; and may God, by his Spirit, enable us faithfully to discharge them.

The great lines of christian obedience, which our blessed Savior takes notice of in the text, are contained in these three particulars: In denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following him.

First, In denying ourselves. Self-denial implies these two things, humility and mortification. Humility is that temper of mind,

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which disposes us not to think of ourselves otherwise than as we ought to think ; neither to over-rate our good or bad qualities, but to form a judgment of ourselves as much as possible according to truth.—Conscious that we are neither at the top nor bottom of the creation, this temper will lead us to act in all things, suitably to the rank and station in which the author of nature has been pleased to place us, neither despising others, nor over-valuing ourselves ; So that it is a mean betwixt abjection of spirit on the one hand, and pride on the other ; though it is in common language, generally opposed to this last, as it is indeed the extreme into which men are most apt to run.—Self-love is wrought in with the most essential part of our constitution ; by the frequent actings of this principle, numberless prejudices are created, which as a mist before the eyes of the mind, magnify the objects which self-love delights to look upon, and thereby leads us to form sentiments of our own worth, false as the medium through which it is seen.—By this means we become strangers to our real characters, and fancy all is right and well with us, when every body else, if they are not very much mistaken, are very certain that it is quite otherwise.—We become insensible to our own guiltiness and the degrees of it, we know not that

that we are ignorant, we feel not that we are weak.—Hence all purposes of reformation are laid aside, we despise instruction, and think it beneath us to make proper application even for an aid that is divine.—Pride therefore, must be allowed to be a disposition absolutely incompatible with the reception or influence of the doctrines of Christ.—It was this hateful principle which marked the characters of the Pharisees and Scribes of old, and inspired them with the highest contempt for the person and religion of Jesus.—The place of his nativity, the meanness of his birth, the poverty of his parents, and the want of a liberal and regular education, filled their minds with prejudices unsurmountable, and shut up all these avenues by which the religion of the Son of God would have otherwise entered into their hearts.—Can any good thing, say they, come out of Nazareth? We know his father, a poor, mean, contemptible mechanic, without breeding, and without erudition; and are not his mother and his brethren with us?—These reflections were the language of pride, nor was it to be imagined, that men who thought that wisdom was to live and die with them, and that the learning of the age they lived in, was theirs, and theirs only, would ever humble themselves to receive a lesson, or submit to be taught by

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the son of a carpenter.—It is humility, the fruitful mother of the graces, that gives us a teachable disposition; humility, arising from a sense of our ignorance, weaknesses and wants, that leads us to an instructor, a helper, and a friend. It is this amiable and lovely temper, which makes us enter with pleasure into Christ's school, and attend to every word that proceeds from his sacred mouth. It is this which qualifies us for being his disciples, and makes us careful to practice the several lessons and duties which he prescribes.—This therefore is the first branch of the Christian's character, or rather of the character of one who is prepared to be a Christian: Like his great Master, he is meek and lowly in heart, sensible, deeply sensible of his imperfections, his failings and demerits, he feels that pride is not made for man, and gladly takes hold of the hand of a Redeemer, generously stretched out for his relief.—And as this heavenly disposition lays the mind open to the evidence and usefulness of Christianity, it must needs run through the whole progress and steps of the christian life.—Spiritual pride, like a worm at the root of a plant, sucks out the very vitals of religion, and leaves nothing but deadness and barrenness behind.—The man who can say, I thank thee, O God, that I am not like other men; who can say to his fellow-

fellow-christian, Stand bye, I am holier than you; is a stranger to the spirit of Christianity, and has neither portion nor lot in the matter.

But this is not all. To deny ourselves, implies not only humility, but mortification. To mortify our lusts, to subdue our irregular appetites and passions, so as to become dead and insensible to the pleasures of sinful gratification, is a temper not only necessary in a Christian, but absolutely necessary to prepare us for entering into that profession, and for becoming the genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. The ground must be cleared of all noxious weeds, before the good seed can be sown with advantage, or with any reasonable prospect of a fruitful return.—The love of sinful pleasure, the habitual attachment which the heart of an unregenerate man has contracted to the world, and to its corrupted and corrupting enjoyments, give religion a forbidding appearance, and almost irresistibly aliegate the affections from the love of God.—It is the natural language of such a one: Shall I forgoe my most favorite delights! Shall I abandon pleasures, without which life itself is scarce worth the possessing, to submit to a discipline so mortifying, cruel and severe? Does the generous author of nature envy his

creatures the small share of happiness he has made them capable to enjoy? Has he given us passions, appetites, and affections; and at the same time surrounded us with an almost infinite variety of corresponding objects; and has he cruelly tied up our hands, so as we dare not employ the one, or touch, or taste the other? Such a religion, surely, may be suitable and proper enough for slaves, but can never be imposed upon reasonable free-born creatures, by a Being merciful, benevolent and good.—Such sentiments as these, are the effects of the most criminal ignorance and inattention; and can proceed from the mouths of none, but those who are shamefully strangers to the nature of true happiness, and to the nature of the religion of Christ.—Reason and experience teach us, that sensual pleasures are by no means the supreme good of man; that where these are immoderately pursued or possessed, they not only deprive us of much more valuable enjoyments, but spoil the relish of them; they not only hurt the constitution, are injurious to health, waste the substance, break in upon the order, peace and harmony of the mind, but give a wretched insensibility to the heart; and by palling upon the senses, defeat the very design for which they are so eagerly sought after.—The same reason and experience also prove, that

that what are called the goods of fortune, such as honors, riches, authority, family, friends, and the like, are valuable only to a certain degree, and according to the use that is made of them: When they rise above that degree, they are perplexing, troublesome, and attended with many inconveniencies; when they are used to improper purposes, they are the source of numberless evils, natural, moral, and intellectual.—Now, does not our own reflection convince us, that we have carried things beyond, greatly beyond their proper lengths? That we have indulged our passions and appetites in many instances, even to extravagance itself, and by giving way to them incessantly, have contracted habits not only pernicious to our best and truest interests, but of such inveterate obstinacy and strength, that no less than a power supernatural and divine is sufficient to conquer and subdue them? And does not reason, in this case, point out the necessity of self-denial and mortification? Does it not convince us, that both our interest and duty require us to give a check to our irregular appetites, to restrain the excesses of our passions, to moderate the violence of our desires, to direct them to proper objects, and confine them within due bounds? And what pray does the religion of Christ require more? Unless perhaps it should

be thought a mortifying circumstance, that it assures us of our own weakness, though at the same time it directs us to a helper who is almighty.—Christianity requires nothing of us, but what it is our interest to perform, and denies us no pleasures that are truly worth the possessing: It does not mean to root out our appetites, but to restrain them, to extinguish our passions, but to controul them; and is so far from declaring those desires to be criminal, that are confined within the bounds of reason, that it gives its own sanction to the gratification of them, and pronounces every forbearance in this case, a sacrifice worthless and unacceptable. Such is the spirit of the Gospel, and such the mortification which it requires.

Dismal indeed is the idea of this evangelical duty given us by the Church of Rome, which teaches its votaries to believe, that the perfection of Christianity consists in abandoning the station which Providence has placed them in, in flying not only from the pleasures, but even from the relative duties of life, and retiring to cloisters and cells, and solitary places of the earth, that they may give themselves wholly up to a lazy contemplative devotion — As if the religion of Jesus had cut off the one half of the religion of nature ;

nature; as if under the Christian dispensation, the great Author of our beings had taken the cure and supply of his creatures wants, immediately, and altogether upon himself, and had left no part of the comfort or happiness of men, to depend upon the mutual intercourse of good offices one with another; and as if they could then only be useful to themselves, when they are quite useless to the rest of mankind.—According to this gloomy system, whatever is most agreeable to a man in the present life must be sacrificed, in order to secure a title to him to the life to come: In order to be spiritual, he must be mortified to sense, I had almost said to common sense, and wherever his natural desires lead him, however harmless and innocent the course, he must be sure to employ all his resistance, and bend himself another way.—Corporal austerities, penances, pilgrimages, watchings, fastings, forsaking the harmless comforts of life, and taking up with its coarsest necessities, are the attitudes of their religious mortification: by these they acquire the character of hermits, which in their language is the same with the venerable name of saints.—Such is the nature of that religious duty, as it is inculcated by the Church of Rome, but how widely different from that which is taught by the gospel of Jesus Christ!

By

By this we are allowed to take hold of the innocent pleasures of life; nay, by this, we are commanded to rejoice evermore: But sure we cannot be disposed to obey this divine precept, if we are not pleased, if we are not happy. God has laid to our hand a variety of pleasurable objects, for the entertainment of our senses, our understandings, our imaginations; if we refuse to make use of them, we defeat the designs of his goodness, and ungratefully throw back the gifts of heaven upon our bountiful and generous benefactor. We are indeed required to mortify our members which are upon the earth, but these are neither our senses, our reason, our harmless delights, nor any of our active powers; they are, according to the Apostle's own account—fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry;—likewise, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, and falsehood:—These, by frequent indulgence, become habitual, become natural, become as it were parts and members of the man himself. These therefore must be mortified, crucified and unlearned, because for these, and such as these, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

Now

Now this duty of religious mortification, is not only necessary to qualify us for becoming the disciples of Christ, and to prepare our hearts for the reception of his blessed Gospel, but must be practised with unremitting care, through all the periods of the Christian life:—It is necessary to qualify us for becoming the disciples of Christ; for until such time as the love and habits of sin are mortified and subdued in us, the spirit of Christ and of his Gospel cannot dwell in our polluted breasts; we cannot serve God and Mammon; we cannot at the same time regard our sinful lusts, and the holy laws which condemn them; if we would cleave to the one, we must of necessity abandon and renounce the other.—It is no less necessary, that it should be practised through all the periods of the Christian life: The oldest Christian in time, cannot say that he is already perfect; while he remains in a state of trial, he feels a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, endeavoring to bring him into subjection to the law of sin and death; so that he must be constantly upon his guard, laboring to subdue it more and more; sensible, that by suspending his vigorous efforts but for a very little time, he may lay a foundation for an after-labor, which, for any thing he knows, may
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be altogether fruitless and vain.—So much then for that self denial, which must be practised by those who would wish to be the faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second qualification required of such, is, That they take up their crosses.—But the illustration of this, and of what follows in the text, shall be the subject of another discourse.

SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

MATTHEW, chap. xvi. ver. 24.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES,
IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME,
LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE
UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.

THE great lines of Christian obedience, which our blessed Savior takes notice of in the text, are contained in these three particulars,—In denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following him.—In the former discourse, I attempted to explain the nature of that self-denial, which must be practised by those who would wish to be the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ: I come now to consider the second qualification required of such, namely, That they take up their cross: The meaning of which, though abundantly intelligible, has been perverted to purposes equally trifling and superstitious.—Nothing can be more childish than to understand this expression in a literal sense, when the metaphor

taphor is so plain and easy: And yet easy and obvious as it is, the literal sense seems to have been adopted by the Church of Rome, and to have consecrated that practice of theirs of taking up, not indeed the real cross of Christ, but a diminutive figure of it, and carrying it about with them in their bosoms. Nothing is more usual than for persons to conceive a certain detestation and abhorrence, even to the very instruments by which their friends have received any injury or hurt; but such is the force of superstition, that it stifles the most natural feelings of the human heart, substitutes love in the place of hatred, and hatred in the place of love; and by an all-powerful kind of magic, transforms into an idol of adoration, that which ought to be held infamous and accursed.—God forbid, that I should glory in any thing, save in the cross of Christ;—are indeed the words of the apostle Paul: But sure, they must be children of the lowest degree of understanding, who can persuade themselves that the apostle meant to glory in the wood of that execrable tree upon which the Savior of the world laid down his precious life.—No, he had a more noble object to glory in, the meritorious sufferings of his adorable Redeemer, which were the ground of his justification, and the foundation

dation of all his hopes;—for by these, and these only, was the world crucified to him, and he unto the world.—Let us therefore quit this puerile interpretation, big with the most absurd idolatry, and give a meaning to the expression that is rational, manly, and analogous to the word of faith.—By a cross, we understand every thing that gives us pain or deprives us of pleasure, whatever afflicts, distresses, or disappoints us; and to take up our cross, is to lay our account with such events, and to bear them with patience, resolution, magnanimity.—In the first ages of the Christian church the disciples were afflicted, persecuted, tormented; to be a Christian was to expose one's self to the world's highest malice and oppression; they were at every body's mercy, and no body had mercy upon them.—These things had been foretold even by Christ himself:—In this world, says he, ye shall have tribulation.—He compares the Christian life to a warfare, in which they have to contend not only with flesh and blood, but with lusts and corruptions, with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, and with spiritual wickednesses in high places.—The apostle assures them, that—If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution.

Had

Had these things happened to Christians unlooked for, the surprize might have given a check to their zeal, and disconcerted them even to the length of a fatal apostacy: Could any thing therefore be more proper, than to put them timeously upon their guard, and to exhort them to call up their most vigorous resolution, that they might be able to withstand the dreadful shock, that they might be able to support themselves under the weight that oppressed them, that they might maintain their integrity and profession, and hold fast the faith that was once delivered to the saints.—Such was the situation of the primitive Christians, and so much need had they of that caution and advice from their Lord and Master,—If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross —Thanks to a kind Providence, we at present live in more peaceable times, and the lines have fallen to us in more pleasant places; but still our Savior's direction is, with the greatest propriety, applicable even unto us.—For though we are at liberty to serve God in that manner which we apprehend will be most acceptable to him; though we are in no hazard of bodily oppression, or persecution for conscience sake; yet the true, the serious Christian, must lay his account to meet with many rubs, crosses, and disappointments,

pointments, in the course of his journey to the heavenly Canaan.—However, the speculative truths of Christianity may have gained belief, the practice of real godliness is not hitherto become fashionable, among those who pretend to direct the taste and manners of the age we live in.—Hence the life of a serious Christian is rather the object of ridicule than regard; and the want of that levity and sinful complaisance, which distinguishes the behavior of a well-bred man, fixes upon the true Christian, the character of morose, surly, and constrained.—The desire of esteem is natural to the human heart, every thing that contradicts it, or is inconsistent with it, is unfriendly to self-love, and must create no little uneasiness and pain: It requires therefore a very high degree of resolution, to withstand the sneers and contempt of our fellow men; and the man had need to call up all the courage and vigor he is master of, who dares to stand alone, and be singular in goodness, in the midst of a wicked and sinful generation.—It is often found likewise, that our temporal interest and our religion do not move in the same path, or run in parallel lines, but frequently cross and interfere with one another, which is a mighty discouragement to a man who wishes to be religious, and at the same time wishes to be rich or

great. We find what effect the love of the world had upon the mind of that hopeful young man in the Gospel, who left our Savior and his religion unwillingly, because he could not come up to his terms, but still more unwilling to part with his large possessions.—A passion for ease, riches, honors, and even for life itself, renders religion in many instances, a painful and laborious work.—We mistake the matter greatly, if we fancy that the way to everlasting glory is smooth and easy, that the path runs through beds of roses, or enamelled meadows: No, briars and thorns are scattered round about us; these, our sins, our corruptions have planted; from these, we must expect to meet with scratches, rubs, and interruptions in our passage: Happy therefore the man, who being convinced, that neither the pains nor pleasures of the present life, are worthy to be compared with the joys that are afterwards to be revealed, resolves, firmly resolves, through the grace and strength of his Redeemer, that he will chearfully submit to the one, and give up with the other; and that neither life nor death, things present or things to come, nor any other creature, shall ever be able to alienate his affections and obedience from Christ, and from the laws of his everlasting Gospel.—This is the man, who
may

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may be said to have taken up his cross; and this is he who is prepared, and of whom it may be expected, that he will continue to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Which brings me to the

Third thing in the text, and in which the Christian's character and duty may be chiefly said to consist, to wit: In following Christ,—If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.—Following Christ, as this duty concerns us, does not mean following him from one place to another, as the disciples did in the days of his flesh, but is to be understood in a moral sense, importing these two things, following his directions, and following his example.—These are not only the genuine marks of a true disciple of Jesus Christ, but are the very essence of his religion, and the ground upon which we are warranted to lay claim to his salvation.—Sanctification, or a conformity to the laws and pattern of our Redeemer, is the only test by which we may conclude, that we are real Christians: And though faith in his person and religion, accompanied by the powerful operations of his blessed Spirit, is the root and spring of holiness; both in heart and life; yet this holiness, is the condition

appointed by the authority and covenant of God, upon which alone we can appropriate to ourselves the merits and righteousness of Christ; as the foundation of our everlasting happiness and felicity; and till such time as we follow peace with all men, and holiness, we can never, according to the constitution of the Gospel, expect to see the face of God in mercy.—If we would therefore wish to be genuine Christians, we must in the

First place, follow the directions of Christ, Ye are my friends, says he, if ye do whatsoever I command you.—The great command of the Gospel, and the first in the order of things, is, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—Ye believe in God, believe also in me:—And again, the Apostle requires us, To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall be saved. Before we can be disposed to give a religious obedience to the practical laws of our Redeemer, we must be convinced of his authority to prescribe them; that he has all power given to him as Mediator both in heaven and in earth; that he is constituted by God the Father, king and head over all things to his Church; and that consequently, we are under the highest obligations in point of conscience, to obey all the known significations of his will.

will.—Now as this faith is not required for itself, but as a means to an end; so, where it does not produce the fruits of righteousness and holiness, it is absolutely worthless and good for nothing: Thus, according to the apostle James, Faith without works is dead: It is as the body without the spirit; and as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.—Nor does the same apostle, by declaring, that he would shew them his faith by his works, mean to assert, that the only design of good works is to be an evidence of faith, but that wherever true faith is, it will be productive of good works; that this is the intention of it, and that if it does not purify the heart and reform the manners, it is like the faith of the devils, which God will never accept of.—The faith therefore which the Gospel requires, is, such a strong and vigorous belief in the person, offices, and doctrines of Christ, as will operate by love, and put all the active powers of the soul in exercise, in the way of evangelical obedience to all the laws of our ascended Redeemer.—So, that if we would wish to be real Christians, and genuine followers of Jesus Christ, we must endeavor to have this divine principle of faith wrought in us; and should take every known mea-

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sure which Christ himself has appointed for that purpose; nor must we rest here, but should suffer its blessed influence to reign over all our thoughts, dispositions and actions, that it may by the concurrence of divine grace, indeed purify the heart, and lead us to an universal obedience of all the commandments of the Gospel: For then, and then only, are we true Christians, when we have a respect to all Christ's commandments.

But in the second place, It is not only necessary that we follow the directions of Christ, we must also follow his example.—He hath given us an example of every private and public virtue, of every divine and social grace that we might follow his steps—He hath exemplified to us, the several duties which result from the relations we stand in to God, our neighbors, and ourselves, and taught us by his life, the way to please God here, and to prepare ourselves for the enjoyment of him hereafter.—His example is full and complete, comprehending in it every step by which we must ascend to glory, so that if we faithfully copy after it, we shall not be found criminally wanting.—It is perfect also in all its parts, so that we can run no hazard
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of offending our maker, by the imitation of it.—It is besides, the example of a person who was Man as well as God, and consequently, is not only imitable in itself, but a proper pattern for men to imitate.—And tho' indeed we cannot come up to its absolute perfection, it is the duty of his followers to be constantly aspiring to it, to be daily adding one degree of holiness to another, and to be growing in grace and a conformity to Jesus Christ, till we attain to the original rectitude of our natures, which is our highest excellence, and the supreme happiness of our immortal souls. And in order to this, we ought frequently to employ ourselves in contemplating the life and actions of our glorious Redeemer, that from these, we may trace out the transcendent perfections of his sacred character, and by fixing the eyes of our minds upon them, may insensibly transplant them one by one into ourselves, till at last we come to shine like him, and are filled with all the fulness of God.

I hope it will not be necessary to illustrate what I am further to add upon this subject; That if we are the genuine followers of Christ, we will be sure to follow him with our most enlarged affections, to those mansions

of everlasting glory, where he now enjoys the triumphs of his victory over sin, and death, and hell, and lay our grateful and adoring hearts prostrate before his footstool. It is the voice of Christ himself by his Holy Spirit;—Look unto Me all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved.—The eye of the Christian's faith will pierce through the vail, and behold his ascended Redeemer in all his pomp and majesty, seated on the high throne of God with ten thousand times ten thousand angels and arch-angels tuning their melodious voices to his praise, and saying, Glory, glory, glory, be to the Lamb, who was slain and is now alive, and shall live and reign for ever and ever.—And can a heart smit with such a divine prospect prevent its warmest wishes from rising above the world, and ascending towards him, who is the darling of the Father, the adoration of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect.—It is the natural language of such a soul, Shall my Savior dwell in the heavens, and can I live patiently, groveling at a distance from him on the earth? O! when will the happy day come, when there shall be no more clouds, or darkness, or distance between us? When shall we meet, never to part any more? In the mean time, my thoughts

thoughts shall be much with him; my desires, my affections, my wishes shall mount unto his very seat;—for whom have I in heaven but thee, or who is there on earth that I desire besides thee? My heart and flesh faileth, but thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.—Thus the faithful follower of Jesus, will not suffer the attractions of sin, or of the world, to divert his heavenly views; but with enflamed affections, will follow his Savior wherever he goes, even up to the imperial throne of God; so that though with respect to his body, he is an inhabitant of the world, yet his conversation is in heaven, and by the actings of faith, he lives above with his Redeemer, and his life is hid with Christ in God.—Such is the temper, the disposition, the exercise of a true Christian: Let us therefore try by these things, what pretensions we have to this amiable and lovely character.—Is a principle of pride effectually subdued in us? and does a sense of our own worthlessness and weakness, sink, and as it were annihilate us in our own conceit? Are we dead to the sinful pleasures of a deluding world? have these no longer any charms for us? Are our several passions and appetites brought into subjection to the rule of reason, and the law

law of faith? and do we feel the power of natural and acquired corruption in our hearts, losing strength more and more every day? Are we followers of Christ as dear children? Do we humbly sit down at his footstool, and hear with pleasure the truths which proceed from his sacred mouth? Do we heartily approve of the Gospel method of salvation, and run with chearfulness to these duties to which he is pleased to send us?—Are his person, his character, his religion, truly precious in our sight, and the objects of our superlative affection? and do we resolve to follow him through good report and bad report, through prosperity and adversity, through health and sickness, through fame and contempt, through life and death? Do we think nothing too hard to do, nothing too dear to part with, nothing too severe to suffer for Christ, and the righteousness and salvation purchased by him for us? Then are we his genuine followers indeed, servants whom he will approve of, and who shall by no means be disappointed of their reward.

Now from what has been said, we may observe, in the first place, That the Christian life is by no means so easy as a great many are fond to imagine.—It is represented by the apostle

apostle Paul as a work and labor; and indeed, those who have entered upon it, have found it to be so in fact.—We generally set out in it, under many disadvantages; our hearts are naturally averse to that which is good, our propensions to evil are strong, temptations from abroad are insinuating, our spiritual enemies are numerous and powerful; we ourselves are weak and without strength; but weak and impotent as we are, this important warfare must be undertaken; our enmity to God, and the ways of God, must be subdued; our love of sinful pleasure mortified; temptations must be resisted.—If we would be Christians indeed, and the faithful followers of the Son of God, we must put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness: That is to say, we must be changed from what we are, and become altogether new creatures; but who is sufficient for these things?—Let us not however, my brethren, be discouraged; the prize is noble we contend for, the reward glorious we have in view; we fight for a crown that shall never be taken from us, for a kingdom that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. When the painful struggle

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is once over, and the short-lived conflict at an end, days, years, ages, nay, an eternity of unmixed and unremitting joy will be the consequence; and who is there so wretchedly foolish, as would not willingly submit to an age of pain, for an eternity of pleasure?—But the condition is not even so hard as this; it is not an age of pain the Christian is obliged to undergo—The hardships of religion are generally to be met with in the commencement of it; in proportion as we advance, the difficulties disappear; by constant and repeated practice, our duty becomes at last habitual, and we shall find infinitely more pleasure in doing good, than we were ever sensible of in the heights of sensual or sinful gratification.—Nay, were the task much more laborious than it is, every attempt to discharge it, being accompanied with the approbation of our own hearts, will render the weight easy, and the burthen to feel comparatively light.—And when we consider, that the great Master whom we serve, requires no man to go a warfare upon his own charges, but has promised all that aid and assistance, that is necessary to carry us forward in every step of the Christian life, sure we have not the least reason to be discouraged with any of those difficulties which cast up to us.—He
 who

who is truth itself has assured us, that his grace shall be sufficient for us, and his strength made perfect in our weakness.—Let us therefore live in a constant dependance upon this captain of our salvation, and endeavor by faith and prayer, to derive from him every necessary grace, that our helper being Almighty, we may become strong in the Lord, and be thoroughly furnished for every good work.

In the second place, to prevent mistakes, I would observe, That a man may be seemingly virtuous and good; nay, may be a lover of virtue, at least of some of the principal branches of it; he may do many things which Christ commanded; he may do many things which Christ did, and at the same time not be a real Christian.—To do a good thing, because it is right and fit in itself, is, to be a moral man.—To do a thing that is good, because it is commanded by the Father of the universe, is to be religious according to the religion of nature: But even this is not enough for those who live under the Christian Dispensation, who have a new object of worship and of obedience pointed out to them by the revelation of the Gospel.—

Ye

Ye believe in God, says our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, believe also in me:—That is, Ye are persuaded of the truth of natural religion, be persuaded also of the truth of the Gospel.—We must believe, that Christ is not only the Savior of the world, but the Governor of it; that he has all power and authority given to him both in heaven and on earth, and is constituted head over all things to his church.—This divine faith will lead us to consider ourselves as his subjects, and dispose us to do what is good from a regard to him, and in obedience to his authority; and when we thus act from a principle of regard to Christ, and to Christ's authority, our obedience is truly evangelical, or the obedience of faith, according to the description the Apostle gives of it, in his direction to the Colossians, the third chapter and seventeenth verse:—Whatever ye do, whether in word or in deed, do all in the name, (or as the word imports in other places of Scripture) do all in obedience to the authority of the Lord Jesus-Christ.—And indeed, in this very point lies the great difference betwixt a moral man and a Christian, betwixt moral goodness and Christian virtue.—If we would wish therefore to be real Christians, the faithful followers of Jesus, we must not satisfy ourselves

selves with doing good, merely because it is good, but because it is the will of Christ and agreeable to his authority. We must have our eye fixed upon him in all we do, and be under the influence of an habitual regard to him in all our wishes, actions, and designs; thus shall we be the glory of Christ here, and be eternally glorified by him hereafter.— This might deserve to be further illustrated, but time will not allow of it just now; I shall therefore immediately conclude, when I have added

In the last place, That though the life of a Christian is a life of action, we are not to fancy that our best actions are in any respect meritorious of the favor of God, or of everlasting happiness.—We have nothing but what we have received; our very inclinations which are good, are infused into us by the Spirit of God himself, who worketh in us both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.—Our best performances are extremely defective and imperfect; when we have done all we can, we are far from coming up to that perfection which the laws of Christ require. Our imperfect services therefore can never merit a reward; so that our only hopes of happiness must arise from the
free,

free, the unbounded mercies of God, procured for us by the attonement and mediation of a Redeemer.—At the same time, the whole tenor of the Gospel gives us reason to think, that the promises our Savior has made to us of eternal life, are suspended upon our faith in him, and obedience to him; so that we are not to expect that heaven or everlasting happiness, will fall into our arms while we are asleep: He has expressly enjoined those who would come after him to the regions of immortal glory, to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him.—By acting up to this divine direction, we shall through the blessing of God be more and more prepared, and made meet for the enjoyment of that felicity which he has purchased for us by his blood.—By this means, we shall in some measure fulfil the terms of the everlasting covenant; and as these terms principally concern us, they are what we ought to be chiefly concerned about.—Satisfied that Christ Jesus has faithfully accomplished his part, and done every thing that was necessary for procuring redemption to us, let us neither trouble ourselves nor others with a great many idle questions in relation to the way and manner of it, which have too often inflamed the passions, and blown up the
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the angry zeal of professing Christians, and alienated their affections, one from another: Let us rather be anxiously concerned to know the precise part that is assigned to us, that having learned what God the Lord requires of us, we may, by the assistance of divine grace, be disposed religiously to observe it.— Thus shall we have hope in God, and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ; thus shall we have the testimony of our own consciences, as the foundation of our comfort and rejoicing at present, and what is of infinitely more importance, shall have the approbation of him who is the Lord of our consciences, in that decisive day, when the fate of men shall be finally determined, and those who have denied themselves, taken up their cross and followed Christ in this world, shall enter in triumph with him into everlasting rest.—To which may God, of his infinite grace and mercy, bring every one of us: In the humble hopes whereof, To God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed as is due, all praise, honor, glory, and adoration, now, henceforth and for ever. Amen.

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S E R M O N IX.

COLOSSIANS, chap. iii. ver. 17.

AND WHATSOEVER YE DO, IN WORD OR
DEED, DO ALL IN THE NAME OF THE
LORD JESUS.

TO establish and fix with ourselves proper principles of action, is of the utmost importance in human life, as it guards from a dangerous carelessness on the one hand, and a most painful anxiety on the other.—While some people live extempore and at random, implicitly following the dictates of humor, passion, or caprice; others are restlessly uneasy, from an apprehension that there is something wanting even in their best actions, to recommend them to the great Governor and Judge of all. In the one

case, it is impossible that men can please God; in the other, it is impossible they can please themselves.—It was therefore one great design of Christianity; not only to point out what actions are to be done by Christians, and what to be left undone, but to lay open the real foundation of Christian virtue, and ascertain the precise principle of evangelical obedience; which, if we are not careful uniformly to guide ourselves by, in all our actions and designs; I will not say, that our highest performances, in the way of religion, are no better than splendid sins, but I think I am able to make it appear, that they are things of mere empty shew, and will be found criminally light in that decisive day, when the actions of men shall be weighed as in a balance, and when every one shall receive according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad.—There is no passage of Holy Writ where the principle of Christian obedience is more distinctly laid down than in the words we have just now read, and therefore they deserve our most serious and deliberate attention:—Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—The rules of a religious life are to be learned from every page of the everlasting

everlasting Gospel ; but the great animating principle that should run through the whole, is little attended to by the bulk of professing Christians.—Satisfied with an external conformity to the laws of their Redeemer, that which really constitutes the obedience of faith is greatly overlooked ; but as the body without the spirit is dead, so obedience, or good works, without this principle in the breast of a Christian, is dead also. It will not therefore, I am hopeful, be judged an useless waste of time, to employ our thoughts a little in enquiring into the nature of that principle which renders our obedience truly evangelical, and acceptable to Jesus Christ : It is with this view I have made choice of these words, which naturally lead our thoughts to what I mean, when we are commanded to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus :—Whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—For explaining of which, I shall,

In the first place, Shew what we are to understand by the name of Christ.

Secondly, What is meant by doing all in his name.

Thirdly, That this is the very principle of evangelical obedience, or of that obedience in a Christian which is acceptable to God.

Fourthly, Why Almighty God has established this principle as the foundation of Christian virtue. And

Lastly, I shall conclude the whole with an inference or two from what may be said.

I am, in the first place, to shew, what we are to understand by the name of Christ.— This expression is used in various senses in the New Testament. Sometimes, In the name of Christ, signifies in his room and stead; so we have this form of words used, John xvi. 7. It is expedient that I go away, that the Comforter may come, whom God will send in my name, that is, in my stead, to supply my place and carry on my work.— At other times, by the name of Christ is meant, the faith of Christ; thus in the commission he gave to the apostles a little before he left them, he commanded them to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that is, in the belief of the three persons of the sacred

sacred Trinity. That this is the true meaning of it, appears from the use of this ordinance in the Jewish Church, where proselytes of righteousness were admitted from among the idolatrous Gentiles by baptism, upon renouncing their false Gods, and professing their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; they were baptized in the name of the God of Israel, that is, in the belief of the one only living and true God.—So that when Christ commanded his apostles to go and baptize all nations, we do not find that he altered the nature or meaning of this venerable institution, but gave it only a wider compass, and extended the object of the Christian's faith, not to the Father only, but to himself, and to the Holy Spirit. Thus by the name of Christ in the ordinance of baptism, is to be understood the faith of Christ, even such a belief in him as will lead us to consider him as the object of our worship, and of our most sincere and religious obedience. Again, by the name of Christ, is sometimes understood the power and energy of Christ. In this sense we find it used by the apostle Peter, when he healed the lame man who sat daily at the gate of the temple, using this remarkable expression: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up, and walk. Acts

iii. 6.—Likewise the sons of Sceva, observing many amazing miracles wrought by the hands of the apostle Paul, took upon them to act the part of exorcists, and to call over those who had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus: But they were soon made sensible, that there was no manner of charm in the sound or letters of the name, but that it was by the almighty power of him to whom the name belonged, that the apostle was enabled to perform such great and astonishing works. The name of Christ was equally made use of in this case, both by the apostle and by these profligate Jews, but how widely different were its effects?—Jesus I know, says the evil spirit, and Paul I know, but who are ye? The consequence of which presumptuous daring to make use of the name of Christ in way of incantation, was, that the man possessed of this evil spirit leapt on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded, as you may see Acts xix. 13, 14, 15, and 16 verses. But the most usual acceptation of the word, and the sense in which I apprehend it must be understood here, is, of the authority of Christ. That this is no uncommon meaning of the name of Christ, will appear from several passages of Scripture,

Scripture, particularly James v. 10. The apostle, in the name of the Lord Jesus, delivers such a one over to Satan. Likewise 1 Corinthians v. 4. We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. Our Savior himself says, John v. 43. I am come in my Father's name, that is, by his appointment: And in the 7th chapter of Matthew and 22d verse, We have prophesied in thy name, or by commission and authority from thee. And indeed, in no other sense can this phrase, the name of Christ, be understood, as it is applied by the apostle in the words of our text. It cannot be meant to signify in the room or place of Christ, as where the Holy Ghost is said to come in his name; for by reading the words with this paraphrase, we should at once see the absurdity of them. Neither is it to be understood of faith in the person or doctrines of Christ, for that is but one branch of the Christian's duty, and by no means the universal principle which must run through and animate the various duties of the Christian life; far less can it be meant of the power and energy, the supernatural aid and assistance of Jesus Christ; for the actions we are required to do in his name, are not merely
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acts of a religious, but also of a civil and ordinary kind, to which it will not be pretended we stand in need of supernatural assistance, agreeably to that similar passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, 10th chapter and 31st verse. Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.—By the name of Christ therefore in this place, can only be meant the authority of Christ; in which sense, it is likewise understood in that place, where we are told, That God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, or an authority above every authority, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess. Not surely in the absurd and childish way of bowing the head or bending the knee, at the bare pronouncing of the name Jesus; but that to his dominion and government, every creature both in heaven and earth should submit, and by a humble confession acknowledge him to be the Lord and Judge of all. Having thus fixed the meaning of the expression, In the name of the Lord Jesus, what I proposed to do, in the

Second place, will not need a tedious discussion; namely, to shew what we are to understand

understand by doing all in his name.—For if by the name of Christ be meant his authority, then to do all in his name, is, to do all from a regard to him, and in obedience to his authority: And indeed, this appears to be the real intention of the Spirit of God in the words of our text, Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—He is constituted by God the Father, king and head over all things. To him therefore we are bound to subject ourselves as to our righteous Sovereign; we must carefully acquaint ourselves with every signification of his pleasure, and learn to know his will, that wherever it points we may religiously follow it. The command of Christ, because it is his command, must at all times lay a sacred and chearful obligation upon us: and a regard to him and his authority must run through all our thoughts, words, actions, and designs.—Nor is it enough that we are animated by this divine principle, in the several exercises of what may be properly called religion; it must also enter into social and domestic life, and have a commanding influence over all our civil and ordinary transactions. When we eat or drink; when, by lawful industry, we labor to make a proper provision for ourselves and families, and for the relief

relief of the poor; nay, when by recreation and innocent indulgence, we endeavor to preserve the health of our bodies, and recruit those spirits which have been wasted by labor and application; even in these, and the like cases, we should always act under a deep sense of the authority of Christ, and do nothing further than as we apprehend it will be agreeable to him; we should have a steady eye to him in all we do; by this means, we shall not only be preserved from every dangerous excess, but our most common actions will become acts of religion, and will participate of the real nature of such; and thus shall we obtemperate the great command of the Gospel:—Whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—Which brings me to the

Third thing proposed in the method, which was to shew, That a regard to the authority of Christ, is the only genuine principle of evangelical obedience, or of that obedience in a Christian which is truly acceptable to God.—It is universally allowed, that the virtue of an action, and the virtue of an agent, are things intirely distinct one from another. An action may be good in itself, and productive of good effects, when at the same time it
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is done with an intention to hurt or to deceive; on the other hand, an action may proceed from good intention, where the consequences are baneful and pernicious: It is the intention, therefore, which constitutes the merit or demerit of the agent; and this, where it is steady and uniform, is said to be the principle from which he acts. What the different principles are, which animate the breasts of men in the various pursuits of life, are only to be judged of from the general tenor and complexion of their behavior. If an elevated station, if dignity and honor, authority and power, appear to be their objects, we immediately conclude, that a principle of ambition gives life and motion to the whole. If riches or wealth, and the most effectual means of procuring them, seem to engross their whole attention, we readily pronounce avarice to be the leading principle within. Or if more rational and manly pursuits are abandoned for the sake of sensual pleasures and corporeal delights, we cannot help ascribing these effects to a principle of voluptuousness, which, insensible to higher and more noble entertainments, takes up with those that are fitted merely to the animal nature, and revels in them in common with the brutes. It is not quite so easy to ascertain

tain the precise principle which influences individuals, in the way of religion. The external appearances of religion, though pretty much the same in different persons, may, and do in fact, often proceed from very different principles. While some are constrained by a slavish fear, and dread of awful punishment to come; others, from hearts enlarged with a principle of divine love, rejoice to run in the way of the commandments of their God; while some make high professions of religion, to conceal their worldly cunning, and serve their temporal interest; others foolishly persuade themselves, that an outward conformity to the rites and ceremonies of religion, will atone for the greatest immoralities of which they have at any time been guilty; while some practise the duties of religion with no other view, but to gain a character and reputation among their neighbors; others do it for no reason, but that they have been trained up in it from their infancy, and the power of habit serves with them instead of the power of grace. Thus the principles are various, though the effects of them are outwardly the same: These, therefore, are among the number of the secret things which can only be known to the consciences of individuals, and to him who is the Lord
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of the consciences of all.—But though it is next to impossible to say, by what particular principle a particular person is guided in religion; yet it is easy to say, by what principle one who pretends to be a Christian ought to be directed, if he would wish to approve himself to the good-liking of Christ his Lord and Master.

There are three principles in morality and religion, each of which, according to the different situations which men are placed in, are highly acceptable to God. There is the love of goodness and virtue for its own sake; a regard to the authority of God the Father, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and a regard to the authority of Christ himself, who is the prince of life, the king and head of the Christian Church. To do a good action, merely because it is good, and because it is agreeable to the nature and truth of things, is to be a moral man; and indeed, were religion out of the question, and were we in our present situation capable of acting upon this principle uniformly and invariably, it would be one of the noblest and most worthy that could possibly animate the breast of man; it is this, which is the principle of action to God himself; and could we

we imitate him in it, we should thereby rise up to the highest perfection of our natures, and become like unto him, who is the greatest, the best, and the happiest of all beings. But God, who knows our frame, has, in great compassion to our weakness, been pleased to superadd the motives derived from his own authority, to those arising from the relation and fitness of things; to these, therefore, men were bound to give the highest attention, while the religion of nature continued to be the only rule of life, and while God, the Father of all, condescended to keep the reins of government in his own hands; to do that which was good from a regard to God's authority, was the great principle of religious obedience, and those who did so were religious according to the religion of nature. But even this is not enough to us, who live under the Christian dispensation, and have a new object of religious worship and obedience pointed out to us, in the everlasting Gospel. Almighty God has in these last times sent his Son into the world, with full power to take the government of it upon himself; so that Christ is now become our immediate prince and law-giver, and the honors that are due to the Father, are due also unto him; for his Gospel is not merely
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a collection of friendly advices, or counsels of perfection, but a system of laws, supported by no less than a divine authority, to which we are bound at all times to pay the highest regards: Without this, we may do what is in itself right and fit, we may perform what he requires of us by his laws, but what we do is not in obedience to him. It is not an obedience that is Christian and Evangelical, and consequently cannot be supposed calculated to please him; it may perhaps answer the purposes of a heathen, of one who is an intire stranger to the religion of Jesus Christ; but we who live under the Gospel dispensation, have a new relation pointed out, as subsisting between Christ and us, the duties of which we must faithfully and religiously discharge, if we are indeed his disciples, and would wish to have a right to the privileges of his friends and followers. He is represented as an everlasting king, having the government upon his shoulders. This is that new relation in which he stands to us, from which alone the duties of obedience can possibly result: He came indeed into the world cloathed with the character of a great Prophet, but this relation can lay us under no other obligations, than that of sitting down humbly at his footstool, and learning

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those interesting truths which proceed from his sacred mouth: He came also vested with the office and character of our high-priest, but surely this relation can infer nothing, but that we sincerely believe and trust in that attonement which he has made for us to the justice of God by his blood; and that in obedience to the declarations which have been made to us, in relation to the end and design of his sufferings, we persuade ourselves that by his merits and intercession, we shall be delivered from sin, and the consequences of sin, and made fellow-heirs with himself of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that passeth not away; the faith of which, as it is of the utmost importance to our present happiness, is the strongest encouragement that can be to animate us in the course of our Christian obedience; which obedience to Christ becomes our duty, by his being constituted of God the Father, the king and head over all things to his church. It is in consequence of this relation, that we are bound to do whatever he requires of us, not only from a conviction that all his laws are just and right in themselves, but chiefly because they are the commands of him whom God hath set over us, and who is our righteous sovereign and law-giver. A high regard to him

him and his authority, should not only accompany every act of religious obedience, but should run through every action of our lives: Thus will our obedience be truly evangelical, or, as it is elsewhere called, the obedience of faith; and by being under the influence of this divine principle in all we do, we shall do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.—I should now proceed to the fourth thing proposed, which was to shew, why a regard to Christ and his authority has been established by God as the great principle of Christian virtue; but this shall be the subject of the following discourse.

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S E R M O N X.

COLOSSIANS, chap. iii. ver. 17.

AND WHATSOEVER YE DO, IN WORD OR
DEED, DO ALL IN THE NAME OF THE
LORD JESUS.

IN discoursing from these words, I pro-
posed in the first place, to shew, What we
are to understand by the name of Christ.

Secondly, What is meant by doing all in
his name.

Thirdly, That this is the very principle of
evangelical obedience, of that obedience in a
Christian which is acceptable to God.

Fourthly, Why Almighty God has established this principle as the foundation of Christian virtue.

And lastly, To conclude the whole with an inference or two from what may be said.

I have already taken notice of what I thought necessary for explaining and illustrating the first three of these general heads, and shall now proceed to the fourth thing proposed, which was to shew, Why a regard to Christ, and to Christ's authority, has been established by Almighty God, as the great principle and foundation of Christian virtue? This question might be proposed in other terms, and it might be asked, Why authority, and not reason, is the rule of religious life to such reasonable creatures as we are? This might admit of a very philosophical discussion, but I do not take this to be either a proper time or place for it.—I shall only therefore observe in the general, that while men had no other guide to direct them, but the dictates of their own reason, they deviated most shamefully from the plainest paths both of virtue and happiness. The whole tenor both of sacred and prophane history, is an undeniable evidence

dence of the truth hereof; nay, in the very use of reason itself, they were led into absurdities, shocking to the last degree; for having lost sight of the true God, the author and governor of all, they degenerated into all the wild extravagancies of polytheism, idolatry, and the most barbarous use of human sacrifices. Thus did they go on from bad to worse, corrupting their reason, and the religion of reason, more and more every age, till God of his infinite mercy was pleased to give a check to their unbounded profligacy and licentiousness, and call them back to be under his own immediate eye, that he might lead them as it were by the hand, and point out their duty to them in a way less apt to be forgotten; and less apt to be misunderstood. But it may here be asked, If the interests of religion and virtue are better provided for under the immediate authority of God, than under the government of reason, is reason therefore altogether useless? or what can be the use of it in matters of religion? To this I answer, that tho' reason is not our rule, it is the discerners of it: It is by this we judge, whether the authority we live under and submit to, be indeed the authority of God; it is by this we must judge also of the real meaning and signification of these laws which God is pleased to prescribe to us; and it is by this we must

endeavor to subdue every passion, appetite, and affection, that opposes itself to the will of our generous and heavenly Conductor.

But more particularly : In the first place, one reason why a regard to Christ, and to Christ's authority, has been established by Almighty God, as the great principle and foundation of Christian virtue, is, that it is in fact the only principle which, in the present state of the human mind, can have a general good influence upon the lives and conversations of men. We have seen, from the experience of all ages, that reason is by no means sufficient for this end ; even in a state of innocence, it could not secure men from the breach and violation of their duty ; far less are its powers equal to the important office of carrying us irreproachably through a course of religion and virtue, in its present state of degeneracy and corruption. Instead of leading the inferior principles of our nature, it is itself misled by them : It is become the sport of our passions, the tool of every irregular lust, of every intemperate desire. Had Almighty God therefore given us up to the direction of this blind and deceitful guide, we should have been led by it into all the false paths of ignorance, error, and destruction.

It is no less evident, that the great principle of moral rectitude, founded on the love of virtue for its own sake, is far from sufficient to give a permanent security to the interests of religion and virtue among men. It has indeed the advantage, as I formerly observed, of every other principle, as it is the principle of action to God himself; but it is by much too refined, by far too elevated and sublime, to have any lasting or solid influence on minds so gross, sensual, and depraved as ours are. We may, indeed, feel some languid impressions upon our hearts of the excellency of virtue, the beauty of holiness and religion in general: But alas! these are too feeble to ward off the baneful influence of temptation, or the violence of contrary passions; and I might defy the warmest advocates for this principle, to produce the example of any one man, in any age of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ himself only excepted, who, animated by no other motive than a disinterested love to goodness, persevered, unalterably persevered in an uniform course of virtue, either human or divine. I am very sensible, there have been abundance of philosophers both in antient and modern times, who with great parade, and in most pompous

pompous expression, have described the intrinsic amiableness of virtue, and the glory of doing good for goodness sake: Such speculations may entertain the imagination for a while, and create a short-lived glow in the heart; but this virtuous warmth is far from sufficient to kindle up the affections into an active unextinguishable flame, so as to bear a man out in the practice of universal goodness, in spite of every opposite interest, temptation, or difficulty, that may happen to come across his way. Accordingly, if we look back to antiquity, we shall find that a disinterested love to virtue, and to their country, was by no means the principle which animated the heroes of former times, in these astonishing acts of public utility for which their names have been handed down to us in all the elegance of the most finished description: Even a Cicero himself, who, for his endeavors to lead men off from the only solid principle of virtue and religion, a regard to the authority of God, has been next to deified by the minute philosophers of our age, is incautious enough, in many places of his writings, to betray the leading principle in his own breast, by which he discovers, that not the beauty of virtue, but an insatiable lust of fame; not the pleasure arising from

from a consciousness of having done his duty, but the hope of being remembered by after ages, as a miracle of wisdom, eloquence, and virtue, was the great incentive to all his writings, actions, and designs. And indeed, whatever may be said, to minds constituted as ours are, the love of religion and virtue for their own sake, cannot be a principle strong enough to preserve us steadily in the practice of our duty. To love virtue, supposes that virtue is not only amiable in itself, but that it appears so to us, which implies, that we have a sense capable of perceiving its genuine and attractive charms: But alas! our moral sense, which is the only one adapted to an office of that kind, is most miserably blinded, perverted, and corrupted; sin has vitiated the noblest faculties of the soul, so that whatever spiritual excellence may be in religion, we see it not, or see it but imperfectly; it makes not that striking impression upon us, which is necessary to draw forth our warmest love; so that to give religion no further security than what arises from a love so defective and imperfect, would be to betray its most essential interests, and to rest it upon a foundation far from being equal to support such a momentous and important load.

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I know likewise, it is said by some, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the true and only principle of the Christian life ; and perhaps, if one was to refuse this, he might be thought at least to depart from the form of sound words. As I would not wish to be mistaken in this matter, I desire it may be observed, that when I affirm that faith is not the immediate principle of evangelical obedience, by faith, I mean an assent of the mind to the truth of a fact or proposition, which is properly an act of the understanding, and no act of the will or affections, which are the only immediate principles of action : Accordingly, we find that a person may believe the several truths of Christianity, and at the same time be no real Christian ; the devils themselves believe and tremble. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed absolutely necessary in order to be a Christian ; one must believe, that the Father hath committed all judgment and authority to the Son, before he can pay a proper regard to the Son's authority : But then it is this regard to Christ, and to Christ's authority, that is the immediate and direct spring of Christian obedience ; and to express the thing otherwise, is to make a point intricate and obscure, which is in itself abundantly

abundantly obvious and intelligible. As there is therefore no other principle, which in the present state and condition of the human heart can have a general good influence upon the lives and conversations of Christians; God hath been pleased to establish this as the great principle and foundation of evangelical obedience, and in this the goodness and wisdom of God shine forth in the most illustrious manner; for nothing, surely, can sweeten our obedience more than a regard to him by whose authority it is imposed; if we love Christ, we will chearfully keep his commandments; if a deep-rooted regard to him and to his authority prevails in our breasts, it will make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the ways of God; it will make his yoke sit easy upon us, and his burthen to feel altogether light. This then is one reason for which Almighty God has thought fit to establish a regard to the authority of Christ, as the chief principle of Christian or evangelical obedience.

Another reason was, that he might do honor to his Son, who by his unshaken obedience to the death, has merited his highest favor and esteem. This is the very reason assigned for it by Christ himself, in the fifth chapter

chapter of the Gospel according to John, the twenty-second and twenty-third verses :—The Father, says he, judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son, that men might honor the Son even as they honor the Father.—The highest honor we can pay to Christ, is to consider him at all times as our prince and sovereign, our governor and head, and as such, to give a chearful and implicit obedience to every signification of his will. We are ready enough to believe the report of any man, of whose veracity and faithfulness we have a good opinion, and the more so if his report contains any thing favorable for us. We are ready enough to receive favors and good offices, from the hands of those who can afford to bestow them upon us.—Whatever honor we give to the Son of God, by receiving him as a prophet, as a teacher of truth and righteousness ; whatever honors we pay to him, by embracing him as a Savior, as a high-priest to reconcile us to God, and to intercede for us at the Father's right hand ; it must be owned, we do him the greatest honor by submitting to him as our king, by making our own wills run up intirely into his, by dedicating our souls and bodies wholly to his service. It is with this very view, that we may honor him whom the Father delighteth

lighteth to honor, that God requires of us, that whatever we do, in word or in deed, we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

I shall only mention one reason more, to shew the propriety of this great principle of the Christian life, which is, that it has a peculiar tendency to beget in us that temper and disposition of mind, which will prepare and qualify us for the society of God and Christ in heaven. If in every action of our lives, we have a regard to the authority of Christ, he will in that case be very much and often in our thoughts; by this means, we shall attain to an habitual acquaintance with him, so that when we come to the higher house, we shall not enter into a land of strangers; but besides the saints we have conversed with upon earth, who are already gone before us, we shall also know him who is at the head of that celestial society, even him in whom we have believed, and shall be known by him, which will be a circumstance of the most unspeakable advantage to the soul of a good man, when it first arrives at glory. Besides, by making Christ the frequent subject of our contemplation here, we shall discover more and more of his divine excellence and perfections; these we will insensibly transplant

plant into ourselves, till by degrees we come to shine like him, and are fit to take our departure for that blessed place, where no impure, or unholy thing shall ever be allowed to enter.

But to conclude: From what has been said, we may in the first place observe, the fatal mistake of those who think they have fully discharged their duty, when they have only performed that which is the external part of it; who care not, if the work be done, with what view or from what principle it is performed: It is the intention, that gives a sanctity even to an indifferent action, and where that is truly evangelical, this will become a real act of religion, and be truly acceptable to God. Yet how little is this attended to by the bulk of professing Christians? though Christ himself is indeed the soul and life of his religion, how very little is he minded by those who pretend to be his disciples? if in any of their sacred offices they condescend to mention his name, it is but for the sake of form, nor do they feel any of that warmth or fervor upon their spirits, which the very idea of Christ is apt to beget in the hearts of those who are truly devoted to him; they go the round of commanded duties,

ties, without regarding the authority of him by whom they are enjoined, without depending upon him for strength, and without looking to him for acceptance. Can such criminal indifference, can such shameful neglect of Christ, be in any respect agreeable to him, or recommend one to his good liking and regard? There are others indeed, who carry the matter still further, and not satisfied with the simple neglect of Christ, set themselves in a contemptuous opposition to him, and do every thing in their power to convince the world, that there is no form or comeliness in him why he should be admired. Such are the pretended free-thinkers of the age we live in, who having collected any little knowledge they have of divine truth from the religion of Christ, not only ungenerously turn it against the Gospel, but against him who is the author of it. It is hard to conceive, what offence Christ or his Gospel have given to these people, or what can be the ground of their provocation. It will not be easy to prove, that Christianity has done any real harm to men, that it has made them worse parents, worse masters, worse subjects, or worse neighbors, than what they were before.—The best things, it is true, may be abused, wisdom may degenerate into craft, and the very best

form of government into despotism and tyranny: But are reason and government upon that account to be altogether banished and set aside? The consequence would be, that in the one case, men would become beasts, and in the other, wild beasts.—The spirit of Christ's religion breathes nothing but peace, love, righteousness and truth; the obvious tendency of it is, to make us wise and happy here, and everlastingly so hereafter.—If instead of improving Christianity to these blessed purposes, we make it an engine of contention, tumult, bloodshed, or oppression, we depart from the very first principles of the Gospel, and substitute our own rancour, our passions, our party spirit, and hellish animosity, in their place; and why these should be charged to the account of Christianity, is more than what our modern deists can pretend to assign any good reason for.—Let us therefore act the part of wise men, and follow the wise directions of him who is our adorable Redeemer; considering, they are not only the good advices of our best friend, but the laws of our supreme governor; and let us in all we do pay a high regard to him, and to his authority; knowing that those who either neglect or despise him before men, shall be publicly neglected and despised by him before

before his Father, and the holy angels that are in heaven.

In the second place, we may also observe from what has been said, the true difference betwixt morality and religion, betwixt a moral man and a Christian, betwixt moral virtue and gospel obedience. Morality consists in a conformity of our sentiments and behavior to these relations which things stand in to us and to one another; and a moral man, in the highest sense of the word, is one who, convinced of the inviolable obligations of virtue, endeavors to regulate his thoughts, his words, and his actions, by the eternal laws of integrity, righteousness and truth.— Now let us suppose that such a one acts up, in every respect, to the perfect standard of moral rectitude; what then are his hopes, or what is the prospect, which the principles of reason give him leave to entertain of a future retribution and reward? Nothing surely besides the natural consequences of his own virtue; but however uncertain we may be as to the degree and extent of these, we are very certain they are far from being equal to that eternal and exceeding weight of glory, which the Scriptures assure us is afterwards to be revealed, and bestowed upon the faithful ser-

vants of Jesus Christ.—But if we take the case as it really is, and suppose that this same moral man, instead of acting up to the standard of moral rectitude, violates the laws of his creation every day in his thoughts, words, and deeds, where is that principle in all the province of reason that can support his hopes, or even preserve his mind from being distressed with all the painful feelings of fear, anxiety, and despair? Whereas Christianity gives us ground to believe, that if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous: That though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; and that if we unfeignedly repent of them, there is a fountain opened in the blood of Jesus, for sin and for uncleanness. — Now what is that circumstance in Christianity that extends our hopes beyond the views of reason? Is not morality and religion the same? Do not the laws of virtue and the laws of Christ coincide with one another? The difference lies in this, that the moral man acts to please himself, the Christian to please his Lord and Master; the moral man regards the law, the Christian regards the lawgiver; and it is this regard to Christ and to his authority, that stamps a peculiar value upon the Christian's character and obedience, lays a foundation

foundation for duty that is easy, chearful, and unconstrained, and through the encouraging promises of him who is faithful and true, secures to him every thing that is great and good, even grace and strength, comfort and protection here, with the sure and transporting prospect of eternal glory and felicity hereafter.

Let us therefore at all times remember that we are not under the law of nature, but under the law of grace; that we profess to be the disciples and subjects of Jesus Christ, and that all our hopes of happiness are founded in him, and in him only.—If we would make these sentiments familiar to us by frequent contemplation, we should be always readily disposed to devote our whole souls and bodies to his service; we should regard his authority as the supreme law of our lives, and whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

To induce us to do so, let us frequently reflect on the many tender condescending methods he has used to gain our affections, and to endear himself to us.—Did he not leave for a time all the glory and happiness of hea-

ven, and go through the various wretchedness of human life? Did he not patiently undergo a most cruel, infamous, and accursed death, and suffer the dreadful wrath of an incensed God, that he might deliver us from ruin and destruction, and open up a passage by which we might enter the blissful regions of everlasting day? Is he not by his Gospel still inviting us, in the most affectionate manner, to come to him that we may have life, and setting before us every consideration that can move the heart of man, to awaken all our powers, and animate us to every branch of our Christian obedience? Is not his law, in the proper sense of the word, indeed a law of love? And have not Christians found to their experience, that his yoke is easy, and his burthen light?—In what a mild and gentle manner does he exercise that authority over us, which the Father hath put into his hands? How easy, how delightfully easy his sway? He has, it is true, set before us a most perfect standard of obedience, to an exact conformity wherewith we are bound at all times to aspire; but if at any time, through weakness, through inadvertency, through temptation, we fall short of the rule of duty, he has himself promised to be our advocate, to procure for us repentance, pardon and acceptance.

ceptance.—His laws are so far from being unnecessary and oppressive, that they are all calculated to make us wise and happy, to guard us from the evils of life, or to support us under them, to diffuse peace, serenity and joy, over the human heart, and to fill the soul with the transporting hopes of glory, honor, and immortal blessedness in heaven.—And can we withhold our profoundest regards from the person and authority of so mild, so condescending, so benevolent a master? The commands of Christ point out the only possible way by which we can be happy, either here or hereafter: Every thing therefore that conduces to make our duty our delight, must be of the highest consequence to us; an affectionate regard to Christ, and to his authority, will sweeten every act of obedience, and make us run with pleasure in the path he has set before us.—Let us therefore cultivate this divine principle with the greatest ardor in our breasts, that under its happy influence we may not only do whatever Christ requires of us, but may do it cheerfully and with all our might, for his sake. Thus shall our obedience be truly evangelical, and by acting the part of Christians here, we shall be entitled to share in the Christian's reward hereafter: God grant it may be so, and to his name be praise.

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the County of New York, for the year ending December 31st, 1908.

County Clerk - J. B. Calkins
County Treasurer - J. B. Calkins
County Engineer - J. B. Calkins
County Surveyor - J. B. Calkins
County Assessor - J. B. Calkins
County Comptroller - J. B. Calkins
County Attorney - J. B. Calkins
County Sheriff - J. B. Calkins
County Jailor - J. B. Calkins
County Prisoner - J. B. Calkins

S E R M O N XI.

PROVERBS, chap. xxx. ver. 12.

**THERE IS A GENERATION THAT ARE
PURE IN THEIR OWN EYES, AND YET
IS NOT WASHED FROM THEIR FILTHI-
NESS.**

THERE is not any thing in morality harder to account for, than that self-deceit which prevails among men, and leads them to impose upon themselves, both in relation to their general characters, and their particular actions and behavior : While some people deliberately act a part inconsistent with the notions they have formed of good and evil, right and wrong, fit and unfit, without any considerable feelings of remorse, or self-disapprobation ; others sit down satisfied with their

their own state and condition, when the most superficial enquiry would be sufficient to convince them, that they have not the least title to speak peace or quiet to themselves.—The conduct of the prophet Balaam may be adduced as a standing monument of the truth of the first case; nor can we open our eyes and look around us, without observing numberless instances of this last one—Though, indeed, the prophet was sensible, that it would be an act of the greatest impiety, to curse that people whom the Lord had blessed, and therefore durst not do a thing so directly contrary to the conviction of his own mind; yet being fond of the reward of iniquity, he dresses up his wickedness in a new form, adds a few palliating circumstances to disguise the malignity of it, in order to make it pass off more easily with himself, and thus, at last, comes to sin against the whole meaning and design of that prohibition which no consideration in the world could prevail with him to go against the letter of. Nor is his conduct at all, in this respect, singular or uncommon; it has a foundation in the disorders and imperfections of human nature, and the like causes will be always sure to produce the like effects. As we cannot be easy, while we are under the influence of any ungratified passion or desire,

so

so if our sense of good and evil happens to
 rise to the same degree of strength with
 which the appetite prevails, we are apt in that
 case to follow the example of the prophet,
 and cast about in our own thoughts for such
 a method of gratifying our wishes; as does
 not so immediately or directly interfere with
 our regard to the rules of our duty, and
 hereby not only obtain the enjoyment of the
 particular object we had in view, but sit down
 satisfied in the consciousness of our own ima-
 ginary virtue; or if it happens, that a par-
 ticular passion operates upon us with a force
 superior to the other principles of our minds,
 our sense of good and evil is in that case
 lost in the tumult, the dictates of our con-
 sciences are not attended to. but, on the con-
 trary, we suffer ourselves to be hurried head-
 long into action, without taking the trouble
 to consider, the reasonableness or unreason-
 ableness of our choice; nay, nor even many
 times so much as the propriety or impropriety
 of the means we use to obtain it, it happen-
 ing here as in the case of inanimate bodies,
 where the motion is always determined by
 the influence and direction of the greater
 force—Hence it is, that when the passion
 is once gratified, and the violence of it sub-
 sides, so as our reason re-assumes its proper
 authority,

authority, and becomes the leading principle in our frame, we are apt to feel those inward remorses of conscience which, if carefully indulged, will be sure to terminate in a true and unfeigned repentance: Or, if this is judged inconsistent with our present happiness, we are ready to stifle the troublesome conviction of our minds, by framing a thousand excuses, and contriving some kind of necessity to justify the part we have acted, which we did not once think of at the time when the passion prevailed.—Now this is what may properly be called unfairness, dishonesty, and falleness of heart, by which people, to avoid the reproaches of their own minds, and create a false peace to themselves, either fancy the circumstances they were in, which they are sure to aggravate in their thoughts, plead a sufficient excuse for them, or endeavor deliberately to explain away the guilt and unreasonableness of their conduct, which happens most frequently in these instances where the precise boundaries betwixt virtue and vice are not so easy to be determined.

Nor does this disposition to impose upon ourselves relate only to particular actions and behavior, but is extremely manifest in that
partiality

partiality with which we judge of our own characters, and form a notion of our real worth.—That people are very apt to be mistaken in relation to the value they put upon themselves, is a truth too glaringly obvious to be denied; whence else comes it about that a great many aspire to places of trust and employments, which upon trial, and a due examination, they are found shamefully unqualified for? Whence is it that persons openly lewd and impious, and who, in spite of all the arts they may use to prevent it, cannot help now and then turning their thoughts upon eternity, and considering how they stand in the affections of that Being, who has everlasting happiness and misery at his disposal; whence is it, I say, that such people can tamely indulge themselves in their profligate and wicked practices, without any violent interruption to the peace of their own minds? This sure can be owing to nothing else but the methods they take to impose upon themselves in relation to their real characters; it being impossible for rational creatures, who have any notions of happiness beyond the present, to make themselves easy under the view of inevitable ruin; so that the stupid tranquility they enjoy, can have no other source besides an ill-grounded apprehension

hension that they are not of the number of them whom divine justice makes it necessary for the Creator of the world to punish—Such mistakes, as they are attended with the most fatal consequences, so it cannot miss to add to the gloominess of the prospect, when we consider that there are few or none of our own species but are liable to fall into them; the disease is founded in the imperfection of human nature, and is therefore in some degree or other universal; it has obtained in all ages, and among all ranks and denominations of men; so that the observation is as old as the days of Solomon, That there is a generation pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.—We are all ready enough to acknowledge the truth of it, in the case of others, but are very unwilling to apply it, in any instance, to ourselves, though by this very thing we make it plainly appear, how much we are under the power and influence of it.—In the mean time, as it is of the utmost importance to our real interest to be cautioned against all mistakes of this nature, it will not, I hope, be thought foreign to the design of the observation in the text, to endeavor to shew, what that is in the mind of man that lays a foundation for them, and gives

gives him so many occasions to deceive and impose upon himself.

In the first place, whoever attentively considers the frame of human nature, and the various affections by which it is moved, will be easily persuaded, that a very particular regard to ourselves is wrought in with the most essential part of our constitution. This principle, is to be found among men, in all the different degrees of it: Where it arises from a consciousness of one's real merit, and bears a just proportion to truth, it is so far from being blameable, that it is a natural source of laudable and worthy actions, and disposes men for the most part to avoid the practice of those things that are inconsistent with the sense they have formed of their inward dignity and value: But as it is seldom confined within due bounds, so wherever it prevails in an immoderate degree, it disguises a man's heart to himself, conceals his blemishes and imperfections from his view, banishes all jealousy and suspicion in relation to his moral character, and leads him to believe that all is right and well with him, when every body else, if they are not very much mistaken, are very certain that it is far otherwise. People, while they are under the influence of this passion,

passion, seldom examine the principles of their own actions, or the motives by which they are determined; but from the violence of this liking to themselves, easily take it for granted, that they are exactly such as they ought to be, and thus indulge in their breasts all those false sentiments that serve to gratify this principle of fondness or self-esteem, and turn an unattentive eye to whatever might hurt, or come in competition with it. Hence it is that, of all others, they are the greatest strangers to their own characters, and are so little acquainted with what passes within, that they pay no manner of regard to such moral reproofs and instructions as occasionally come in their way, being persuaded in their own minds that these have no relation, and are by no means applicable to them. Hence it is also that men are apt to think themselves unjustly dealt by, if others are preferred to places which they imagine their own greater worth gives them a superior title to; and from this source are to be derived all those ill-natured passions which discover themselves in cases of competition and rivalry, and determine people to bring others, in their imagination, down to their own level, when they find that they cannot ascend in a regular way to theirs; so very natural is it for a fond and
partial

partial regard to ourselves, to inspire us with mistaken notions, both with respect to our real and comparative worth, that it may be justly assigned as one ground for the truth of the observation in the text, That there is a generation pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.

In the second place, People very frequently take occasion to impose upon themselves from a principle of self love, which consists in a strong and commanding desire of happiness in general, and an aversion to misery and pain.—Now that the influence of this principle, in the mistakes we fall into, in relation to our real characters, may be the more distinctly observed, it will be necessary to take things a little back, and observe the progress of the mind's operations, in the different stages of life.—So soon as we come into the world, and begin to take notice of things, we find ourselves surrounded with an innumerable variety of objects, approving themselves to our senses by all the charms of novelty and beauty; and as it is impossible for the mind in its infant state, to be entertained with pleasures of a moral nature, or such ideas as result from reflection, it must necessarily lie open to gratifications conveyed to

it from without, and take up with such sensations as are most obvious, and make the deepest impressions. Sounds and colours, tastes and smells, with their various modifications, are usually the chief employment of our thoughts in our younger years: As these in a manner force themselves upon us, wherever we turn our eyes, without any trouble on our part to procure them, so the pleasure we receive from them, being the highest we have then any notion of, must necessarily raise our desires and engross our attention, till by a long acquaintance they become so much familiar as to lose their freshness; at which time they give place to enjoyments of a different order, and leave men at leisure to pursue the objects of avarice or ambition, luxury or voluptuousness, according as example, education, or the particular constitution of their bodies render either one or other of them most agreeable; and when once they are heartily engaged in pursuits of this kind, the passions of which they are the proper objects, gain strength by indulgence, and come at last to form themselves into settled and incorrigible habits. Whereas the powers of conscience and reflection, as well as the amiable dispositions to virtue and goodness, being but seldom called out to exercise, come
by

by degrees to lose their influence, and have not force enough to restrain the excesses of our immoderate desires: By which, the proper balance of our affections not being carefully maintained, those of an inferior sort assume the government of us, and lead us to a violent pursuit of such gratifications as are inconsistent with the design of our rational natures; and in the end will be found to be highly prejudicial to our best and truest interest. Accordingly, when by some accident or other, we happen to be interrupted in the course of our enjoyments, and obliged to look into the state of our own minds, we can observe nothing there but the greatest disorder, tumult and confusion; and as a prospect of this kind cannot miss to affect us with a very sensible uneasiness, so a principle of self-love, to avoid the painful sensation, will readily determine us to turn our thoughts another way. In the same manner as a man who has had a general view of some scene or other, enough to satisfy him that it is very disagreeable, shuts his eyes that he may not have a more particular or distinct view of its several deformities; just so, men find that the survey of themselves, their own heart and temper, their own life and conversation, does not afford them satisfaction, things

are not as they ought to be, therefore they turn away, will not go over particulars or look deeper, lest they should find more amiss; but on the contrary, give themselves up to the pursuit of such objects as tend more effectually to the present peace and quiet of their minds. Now as we cannot attain to the knowledge of a thing to which we never gave any attention, and as a commanding aversion to pain prevents our attending to the disordered state of our own minds, it is no wonder that we fall into a great many mistakes in relation to our real characters, and imagine ourselves to be what in reality we are not. Nay, though a man should have the resolution to look into his own heart, and turn his thoughts home upon himself, yet when he observes how far matters are wrong with him, how much he is involved, and what a world of trouble he must necessarily put himself to, before he can restore them to their proper order; the prospect of so much uneasiness has a natural tendency to enfeeble his powers of action, to discourage the attempt, and return him back to the pursuit of these very enjoyments, which, he cannot miss to know, are the unhappy source of all these disorders which he feels within: And what usually bears him out in this case, is some faint hopes that he

he may, and half resolves that he will, some time or other, go through with that reformation, which a regard to his present ease will not allow him to set about till afterwards.—Whenever the dismal state of his affairs comes across his thoughts, these imaginary purposes present themselves at the same time to his view, and the merit of such resolutions contributes to give present ease to his mind, and makes him fancy himself to be a much better man than he really is. So that an excessive principle of self-love, or an immoderate desire of ease and pleasure, and an aversion to misery and pain, has a wretched tendency to keep a man ignorant of his own character, to lead him into a great many mistakes in relation to his real worth, and to involve him in the same self-deception with those persons represented in the text, who are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.

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S E R M O N XII.

PROVERBS, chap. xxx. ver. 12.

THERE IS A GENERATION THAT ARE
PURE IN THEIR OWN EYES, AND YET
IS NOT WASHED FROM THEIR FILTHI-
NESS.

THAT men are very apt to fall into
mistakes, both in relation to their gene-
ral characters and their particular actions and
behavior, and that these mistakes are often
extremely pernicious to our best and truest
interests, are truths, melancholy truths, con-
firmed by every day's experience and observa-
tion ; so that it must be allowed of the great-
est consequence to us to be properly cautioned
against every thing of this nature ; and that we
may be the more effectually guarded against
N 4 them,

them, I thought it would be of some use to enquire a little into their genuine source, and examine the causes from which they most commonly proceed.—In the former discourse, I observed, in the first place, that these mistakes are sometimes owing to that very particular regard to ourselves, which is wrought in with the most essential part of our constitution, and which, where it prevails in an immoderate degree, disguises a man's heart to himself, conceals his imperfections and blemishes from his view, banishes all jealousy and suspicion in relation to his moral character, and leads him to believe that all is right and well with him, when every body else, if they are not very much mistaken, are very certain that it is far otherwise. I observed likewise,

In the second place, That people frequently take occasion to impose upon themselves from a principle of self-love, which consists in a strong and commanding desire after happiness in general, and an aversion to misery and pain. When persons first begin to look at home, to survey their own heart and temper, their own life and conversation, sensible how far matters are wrong with them, how much they are involved, and what a world of trouble they

they must necessarily put themselves to before they can rectify and help them; the painful prospect readily disposes them to turn their thoughts another way, by which means they remain perfect strangers to their true characters, and from some faint purposes of an after reformation, conclude that all in due time will be right and well with them; and thus fancy themselves to be, what in reality they are not.

But in the third place, It is extremely observable that example, education, and the wrong use of names, lay a foundation many times for people's imposing upon themselves, both in relation to their general characters and their particular conduct and behavior. Human nature is so constituted as to be capable of improvement in no other way, but by the means of observation and instruction; so that in our younger years especially, our sense of things, or our notions of good and evil, are intirely at the mercy of those we converse with, or who have the care of our education; and it frequently happens that the sentiments we take in at that time run through the whole of our lives, and are never afterwards called in question. A thousand things may occur to prevent our examining

ing the reasonableness or unreasonableness of our opinions, want of time or opportunities, or perhaps the want of a proper disposition, may determine us to take for granted that they are agreeable to truth and the nature of the case, when a very little pains would be sufficient to convince us that they are far otherwise.

We are apt to imagine, that these actions which are fashionable, are at the same time laudable and praise-worthy. and the particular vices in vogue are justified by the manners and authority of those who practise them. Accordingly, for the most part, we judge of actions and characters by the regard or disregard we see paid to them by the country we live in, and never suspect ourselves to be in the wrong, while we act in conformity to the customs and fashion of the place. So that if iniquity be established by a law, or if, what is of worse influence, it be established by the law of fashion, we can calmly and deliberately indulge ourselves in the practice of it, and at the same time fancy we are innocent and clean from our own filthiness.

Education likewise contributes not a little to inspire us with prejudices in favor of one course

course of action, and against others. Our parents and tutors think themselves obliged to impress our minds with sentiments of what they take to be religion and virtue; if these happen to be false, as it is an hundred chances to one but they are so, the bias encreases with our years, till at last, not being able to call to mind the time when we became first acquainted with them, we proceed to look upon them as if they were in some respect original and innate, and consequently sacred and indisputable; and are so far from suspecting the truth of them ourselves, that we take it egregiously amiss to have them called in question or contradicted by others. Thus a great many indulge themselves in a course of superstition or false virtue, in a blind obedience to authority, and are fully satisfied they are in the right, because they cannot allow themselves to think that their fathers could have been in the wrong; and it is the peculiar unhappiness of persons who take their sentiments merely from education, that their prejudices are of all others the most stubborn and inveterate, and dispose them to shut their minds against every thing that might serve to give them better information; they feel none of these doubts or suspicions within, which are apt to make men jealous of the truth of their opinions, or the rectitude and propriety
of

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of their actions; education, and a long continued practice, have thrown an effectual bar in the way of every thing of that kind, and consequently they make themselves quite happy in the apprehension of their own innocence, when at the same time they are very far from being washed from their iniquities.

Once more: People very often suffer themselves to be thoughtlessly betrayed into the practice of vice, by a wrong application of names to such things and actions as do by no means belong to them. We are taught from our infancy to entertain a certain regard to particular words and sounds, and to look upon others as odious and ill-deserving: Murder, adultery, falshood, drunkenness, rebellion, and the like, are names no sooner heard, but they excite in us the idea of something shocking, infamous, and of ill-desert; we cannot think of them but with abhorrence—and yet when the same actions happen to be gilded over with the specious appellations of honor, courage, gallantry, policy, or public spirit, we not only suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by them, but justify our conduct to our own thoughts, and think we have done nothing criminal. Thus the man who would heartily abhor the thought of murdering

dering his friend, will nevertheless fancy himself obliged in honor to send him to another world, on account of some trifling and perhaps but imaginary affront. Lewdness and prostitution are palliated by the softer names of gallantry and a genteel amour; and an ill-natured opposition to the most just and reasonable measures of government, is sanctified by the generous epithet of public spirit and love to our country. But there is not a word in any language that has been more abused and prostituted to serve more infamous and unworthy purposes, than that of zeal: Instead of signifying a dispassionate regard to God, and a hearty disposition to promote the interests of truth and virtue among men by rational argument, by good example, by moderation and forbearance, it has been made to stand for furious hatred, bitter wrath, the spirit of party, and has given sanction to all the unnatural methods of oppression, persecution, and destruction. While the apostle Paul, before his conversion, persecuted the Christians from place to place, with all the envenomed rancor of an angry bigot, the rage of his temper appeared to him under the notion of a commendable zeal, and he thought that in rooting Christianity and Christians from the earth, he was doing God good service.

service. The disciples also, when they desired their master's leave to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, fancied they were animated by a laudable zeal for his glory, when at the same time he told them, that they knew not what spirit they were of. And indeed in all ages of the Christian Church, there have been found but too many, who, under the venerable pretence of zeal to the honor of God, have committed the most horrid barbarities, and for the sake of religion have endeavoured to make desolate the earth. By christening the hateful malice of their own dispositions, with the amiable title of zeal to the glory of God, without hesitation or the least remorse, they have deliberately proceeded to practise outrages, to commit murders, to enslave nations, and as one very well expresses it, to commit abominations in a stile of devotion, to talk blasphemy in the name of the Lord, to prostitute God's authority in destroying his works, and in the name of Christ to anathematize and destroy those whom Christ died to save. Such are the dreadful consequences that follow from being guided by human authority, by human example, or by the mere sound of names, that these may be justly reckoned among the chief causes which lead men
into

into so many unhappy mistakes, both in relation to their general characters and their particular actions and behavior.

But in the last place, We are extremely apt to impose upon ourselves, by entertaining false notions of God and of religion: The observation is certainly just, that the moral conduct of men is more or less exact according to the sentiments they have conceived of religion, and the notions they have formed of God. If we therefore represent him to ourselves under the character of an arbitrary Being, who now commands one thing and immediately another, who is pleased and displeased with his creatures by turns, without any shadow of reason, and has no other foundation for the laws of his government, besides his own sovereign will and pleasure, without the least regard to the nature and relations of things; such conceptions will readily lead us to imitate him, by a course of irregular, disjointed, and self-contradictory practices. Or if we can allow ourselves to fancy, that he has created men with various faculties of mind, and different powers of perception; that in the course of his providence he has placed them in different circumstances, and afforded much better means and opportunities

tunities of improvement to some than to others; that he has given them a revelation hard in some things to be understood, and that nevertheless in these very instances, he has commanded an exact conformity of sentiments and religious faith to a great variety of articles, and that too under the penalty of eternal condemnation: Such a false and absurd view of the divine administration would not only serve to disturb the peace and quiet of society, but would naturally lead men to propagate religion by force, and to persecute and destroy all those who could not possibly bring themselves to subscribe to the same creed, and believe the same articles of faith. That these are the genuine consequences of such sentiments, will be undeniably evident to those who allow themselves to look abroad into popish countries, where unity in the faith is thought such an essential branch of true religion, that the salvation of mankind is deemed to depend upon that single point; so that those unfortunate persons who cannot come up to it, as they believe the Almighty will damn them hereafter, they think themselves obliged, as his vicegerents and deputies, to damn and destroy them here; and it is certain, that the same cause, where it is allowed to operate, will always be sure to produce

duce the same effects. For as religion consists in forming our tempers and conduct to a conformity with the image and example of the Deity, these who entertain mistaken apprehensions of him, will thereby prepare for themselves a false standard of action, and will thus be unavoidably betrayed into a great many excesses and inconsistencies of behavior, their consciences all the while approving and acquitting them as if they were truly religious; by which means they will enjoy that inward peace and serenity of mind, which accompanies the practice of real goodness and virtue, and while they are doing the works of the Devil, will readily think they are acting a part highly agreeable in the sight of their Creator.

And as wrong apprehensions concerning Almighty God, contribute to involve us in a great many mistakes in relation to our real characters; so we are no less apt to impose upon ourselves, by entertaining false notions of goodness and religion, and by making that the ground of divine acceptance, which does not in the nature of the thing entitle us to it. For though revelation hath taught us what is good, and what the Lord requireth of us, yet daily experience evidently shews, that great numbers

of men, finding the practice of real religion inconsistent with their favorite lusts and vices, have substituted something else in the room of it, and satisfy themselves with a form of godliness, while they remain absolute strangers to the power of it. Our blessed Savior hath expressly taught, that repentance, faith, and a holy obedience, are the necessary conditions of our happiness both here and hereafter, and that without them we can never expect to see the face of God in mercy. And yet how often do men impose upon themselves, in relation to every one of these, and take up with such terms of salvation as can never in the nature of things qualify them for the enjoyment of it, and which God has no where declared he will accept of? For, as to the

First of these, Instead of a true and genuine repentance, how many are there who think to atone for their faults, and render the Deity propitious to them, by using a great many barbarous and inhuman severities upon themselves, as if the merciful God were never better pleased than when we do something very displeasing to ourselves; as if he were much delighted with the misery and torment of his creatures, and to be cruel and unmerciful to ourselves, were the only way to move his compassion

compassion towards us? This was the religion of the antient Pharisees; they fasted twice a week, and fancied themselves superlatively holy upon that account, as if the proper way to purify the stomach from the dregs of a debauch, was sufficient at the same time to purify the conscience from the guilt of it: And indeed, it were to be wished, that a great many who pretend to be Christians, did not foolishly imitate them in this respect, by imposing strict penalties and corporal severities upon themselves, by abstaining from several sorts of meats and drinks, by watching and afflicting their bodies with several sorts of rigors; whereas one severe resolution of a good life well prosecuted, is a thousand times better than all this. For experience shews, that men may be very severe to their bodies, and compassionate to their lusts: The Pharisees fasted often, but they devoured widows houses.—It is possible that men may kill themselves by corporal austerities, and yet never mortify one lust; they may submit to a thousand penances, and yet never truly repent of one sin; they may turn pilgrims, and go as far as Jerusalem to visit our Savior's sepulchre, and yet never know the power of his death.—It is true indeed, that fasting, where it is discreetly used, may prove a good enough

instrument of religion ; but where the means are substituted in place of the end, where it is made to stand for a godly sorrow for sin, and comes in the room of it, it is a false and impious superstition, which will infallibly deceive those who depend upon it, and which God has never required at any man's hand.—How many are there likewise, who take up and satisfy themselves with a mere sorrow for sin, as if grief was the whole of repentance, and as if they had nothing either further to do, or to be afraid of? It is indeed a good introduction to it, but the porch, though never so fair and spacious, is not the house itself. For it is not a great many constrained sighs and tears, it is not a mechanical working up of the passions to a rueful melancholy tone, which constitutes the true nature of penitential sorrow for sin, or which God will accept and approve of : But it is such a grief as touches the heart, diffuses itself over the whole frame, and produces in the soul a constant and lasting aversion to evil.—Men be-fool themselves infinitely, when by venting a few sighs and groans, putting the finger in the eye, and whimpering out a few melancholy words, and concluding all with, I wish I had never done so, and am resolved never to do so more ; they will needs persuade themselves

selves they have repented; when perhaps in
 this very thing their hearts have all the
 while deceived them, and they really neither
 wish the one nor resolve the other: But
 whether they do or not, it is certain, all true
 penitential sorrow must needs proceed much
 further; it must force and make its way into
 the very inmost corners and recesses of the
 soul, must shake all the powers of sin, and
 produce in the mind an unalterable resolu-
 tion to depart from all manner of iniquity:
 For if our sorrow for sin carries us not thus
 far, let it express itself ever so loudly and
 passionately, and discharge itself in never so
 many showers of tears and volleys of sighs,
 yet by all this it can no more purify a man's
 heart, than the washing of his hands can
 cleanse the rottenness of his bones.—So that
 whoever takes up with any thing less than
 this, however they may satisfy themselves
 with the notion of being true penitents,
 they embrace at best but a fond delusion,
 and will one time or other meet with a
 dreadful disappointment.—I might also
 shew here, that misapprehensions concern-
 ing the nature of religious faith, have a
 tendency to lead us into mistakes, both
 with regard to our characters in general,

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and to the propriety or impropriety of our particular actions and behavior; but this, with the other points which remain to be taken notice of, shall be the subject of the following discourse.

SERMON

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PROVERBS, chap. xxx. ver. 12.

THERE IS A GENERATION THAT ARE
PURE IN THEIR OWN EYES, AND YET
IS NOT WASHED FROM THEIR FILTHI-
NESS.

I N enquiring into the grounds of that
self-deceit which prevails among men, I
observed, that a particular regard to our-
selves, which is wrought in with the most
essential part of our constitution, naturally
leads us to form opinions of ourselves more
favorable many times than is consistent with
truth — That a principle of self-love, or a
commanding desire of ease and pleasure, and
an aversion to misery and pain — That ex-
ample, education, and the wrong use of
names,

names, prove the foundation of numberless mistakes in relation to our general characters, as well as our particular actions and behavior. I observed farther, that we frequently impose upon ourselves, by entertaining false notions of God and of religion: Though revelation hath expressly taught us what is good, and what the Lord our God requireth of us, yet daily experience shews, that finding the practice of real substantial goodness incompatible with our favorite lusts and vices, we are but too apt to substitute something else in the room of it, which when we have discharged, we fancy ourselves truly religious, and the very same that God would have us to be. This I proposed to illustrate in the three great cardinal duties of the Christian life, repentance, faith, and obedience. Instead of a true genuine Gospel repentance, how many are there who satisfy themselves with a mere unavailing sorrow for sin?—with fasting, or a partial abstinence from certain kinds of meats and drinks? with pilgrimages, penances, and afflicting their bodies with several sorts of barbarous and inhuman severities? and when they have gone through a discipline of this kind, make themselves perfectly easy, from a fond persuasion that they are real penitents, and that God has certainly forgiven

given them ; when perhaps by all these, they have not mortified one lust, nor wiped off the smallest spot of their moral filthiness and pollution.

Again : Though faith in the person, the offices, and doctrines of the Son of God, is always represented in the New Testament as an indispensable term of salvation, yet how often do people substitute an overbearing and confident persuasion that Christ Jesus will save them, in room of that divine faith which the Gospel requires as necessary to please God ?—This is the case with those who are willing to embrace Jesus Christ, as a kind condescending Savior, and at the same time will have none of him to reign over them. They depend upon his merits and intercession while they despise his authority, reject his government, and live in the perpetual violation of his just and righteous laws : They take presumption for faith, and their own arrogance for the work of the Spirit of grace.

On the other hand, Many satisfy themselves with a mere speculative belief of the articles of Christianity, as if this were sufficient to constitute that saving faith upon which their happiness

happiness depends. It is true indeed, an orthodox faith is good so far as it goes; but then it must not rest only in the head, but must descend from thence upon the heart and life, and be carefully prosecuted into all the proper and genuine consequences of it, otherwise it can do us no real service. The apostle Paul puts this very case, That a man may have the theory and knowledge of religion, and yet if it does not produce the fruits of a good life, it is absolutely worth nothing. 1 Corinth. xii. 2. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, nay, though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing.—And indeed the reason is abundantly plain, because the knowledge of religion is only in order to the practice of it; and an article or proposition of faith is but a very idle thing, if it does not produce such actions as the belief of such a proposition requires: And though the apostle James has expressly assured us, that faith without works is dead, and that those who trust to it, do but deceive themselves; yet there are a great many very solicitous about an orthodox faith, and mightily concerned to know what the Scriptures, but especially what the Councils and Fathers have declared in
such

such a matter, and providing they be but what they call sound in their principles, easily excuse themselves for doing that which is as expressly forbidden in the word of God as any thing is there commanded to be believed. Whereas religion does not so much consist in nicety and subtlety of belief, as in integrity and innocency of life; and the truest and most orthodox faith in matters of religion, where it is not accompanied with an answerable practice, is like the image presented to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, whose head was of fine gold, but the legs and feet were iron and clay.

In the mean time, if we consider how dubious and uncertain the meaning of the word Faith hath been rendered, by the interpretation of some of those men who set themselves up for the spiritual guides of mankind, we need not be surprized to find that numbers have fallen into mistakes in relation to the proper object and effects of it: What is infinitely more astonishing, is, that that holy and chaste obedience which the Gospel requires, should, by the management of designing men, be made to give place to the counterfeits of all religion, superstition, enthusiasm, and will-worship; and that people should suffer themselves

selves to be so far imposed upon, as to take up with these in room of that integrity of heart and uprightness of manners, which seem to be the principal view of every divine revelation. Nothing can be more warmly inculcated in the sacred writings, than righteousness, mercy, and sobriety; to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, are always represented as the weightier matters of the law, the very essentials of religion, and without which, all pretensions to it are evidently groundless and vain.—And yet how easy is it to observe, that a great many take up with a regard to such things as Almighty God has made no part of our duty, or satisfy themselves with the use of the means and instruments of religion, in place of the end and design of it? They either on the one hand, substitute the commandments and traditions of men, in room of the authority of the great God, or, which is equally pernicious, are extremely punctual and exact in the attention they give to the positive institutions of Christianity, while they live in a scandalous and shameful neglect of the moral and unalterable parts of it — The pilgrimages, the penancies, the bowings of the church of Rome, the idolatrous veneration they pay even to the foibles and follies of their saints
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and martyrs; the religion they place in their regards to images and vestments, crucifixes, and childish reliques, and in a word, their blind submission to the ridiculous decrees of popes and councils, while in the mean time they openly indulge themselves in the violation of all the rules of universal charity and mercy: These are glaring instances of the truth of the first case, and there is not any church in Christendom that does not afford numberless examples of this last one. For even among ourselves, how many are there, who when they have gone the round of a stated course of devotion, have spent some time in reading or hearing the word of God, have employed themselves in praying, communicating, or in religious conversation, think they have sufficiently acted their part, and done all that God requires of them; when, in the mean time, they are not at any pains to examine, what influence these religious exercises have had upon their lives and tempers, and whether they have really contributed to make them either wiser or better? Now persons, by such a management as this, impose egregiously upon themselves; for it is evident, that all these are designed for some further and greater purposes. We read and hear the word of God, that

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that we may learn our duty to him and to one another, and be supplied with motives proper to excite us to the practice of it. We receive the blessed sacrament, in order to inflame our love to God and to Jesus Christ, to inspire us with a real hatred of sin, and to strengthen our resolutions to a holy and virtuous life, and we address our prayers to the Father of mercies, not only for such spiritual and temporal blessings we stand in need of, but that by this religious exercise we may raise our minds to a capacity of receiving them with gratitude, and a disposition to make a wise and sanctified use of them, which is the only temper and frame of heart that can render us the suitable objects of divine grace and bounty.—As this is the great design Almighty God had in view in appointing them, those who come short of it, and satisfy themselves with the means, while they are altogether careless and indifferent about the end, do but deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them: Accordingly, we find our Lord and Savior hath assured us, That it is not every one that says unto him, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of the Father that is in heaven—It is not a specious regard to the external circumstances and appendages of Christianity,

Christianity, nor a hollow profession of religion, however flaming it may appear to be; it is not a punctual and constant attendance upon ordinances, though of divine appointment, that is sufficient of itself to do the business; neither is it our being united to this or that religious sect or party; much less an angry and bitter zeal spent in defending the principles we embrace, or the party we are united to; I say, it is not any one, nay, nor all of these together, however necessary some of them may be in their own room, that can render a person destitute of the grace of God, and the virtues of a good life, pleasing and acceptable to his Maker; for though men's affections may be bribed and betrayed, yet this sure can never be supposed to be the case with respect to God, who is set far above every weakness of every kind. And therefore we are told, that at the day of judgment, those who depend upon such frivolous grounds of acceptance, will find themselves wretchedly disappointed. It will not then be enough to represent to the Judge of all the earth, that he has been taught in our streets, or that we have attended the ordinances of his Gospel; that we have prophesied, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in his name: The question will not then be put to us, How long

long we have prayed? how often we have communicated? or how confidently we have believed? But, how sincere we have been in all these? what good we have done? and how uprightly we have lived? So that if we shall be found defective or careless in these respects, whatever our profession, whatever our regard for the external offices of religion, may have been, we shall not be able to escape that dreadful sentence, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Once more: There are some persons, who instead of resting satisfied with the word of God as a sufficient rule of faith and manners, flatter themselves that the supreme Being will condescend to make known his will by some inconceivable suggestion of it to their minds, for the direction of their conduct, especially in the most remarkable occurrences of their lives: Accordingly, instead of bringing their doubts and difficulties to the test of the sacred Scriptures, they are apt to imagine, that these sentiments and affections with which they find themselves animated, upon their return from a solemn act of devotion, are undoubted impressions of the Spirit of grace, and distinct intimations from above how they are to behave,

have, without being at pains to examine whether these affections and sentiments are agreeable or disagreeable to the rules of the Gospel of Christ. It must be admitted, that in the first ages of the church, the Holy Spirit of God was pleased not only to open the understandings of the primitive Christians to behold the wonderful things contained in his law, and to renew their wills to the love and obedience of the truth, which blessed operations seem to be equally necessary now as they were then, and they are what we have still reason to expect and depend upon; but over and above this, he also inspired them with the knowledge of these divine truths, which they had no other means to become acquainted with, and taught them in an extraordinary way the rules and measures of their duty. But now that we have the whole mind and counsel of God, in every point that concerns our happiness, set before us in the Gospel of his Son, we have no reason to expect any new revelation from above, or to believe that the ordinary influences of his Spirit are meant to give us any new notices of duty, but rather to illuminate our minds in the knowledge of that which we have already, and to dispose our wills to a religious compliance with those terms of salvation that are offered to us in the Gospel. Those therefore who expect a new discovery of the divine will,

while his word lies open for their direction, do but indulge their own laziness, and are the dupes of their own credulity; and if such persons shall allow themselves to fancy, that their prejudices, which usually encrease and gain strength by a practice of this kind, are the genuine return of their prayers, and an intimation from the Spirit of God how they ought to behave; there is no form of wickedness so great, no act of villainy so atrocious, but they may by the force of this delusion be unavoidably betrayed into; and that this has been many times the case in fact, is what every body must allow, who knows any thing of history or the world. How often have we heard of persons, who have pretended a call or commission from heaven, to do such things as were absolutely inconsistent with all the known rules of equity and justice? How many instances of persecution for conscience sake have sprung from this root? and what strange confusion and disorder it created in a neighboring country not a great many years ago, every body must certainly remember. Nor are the persons who pretend to it always conscious of the cheat; they are themselves frequently deceived and imposed upon; and while they fancy they are so peculiarly holy, as to be admitted to an intimate correspondence and intercourse with heaven, and

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to receive immediate directions from above, a very little reflection would be sufficient to convince them that they are far from being washed from their filthiness.

Thus have I endeavored to give some account of that partiality and self-deceit which prevails among men, and leads them to impose upon themselves, as well in relation to their general characters, as to their particular actions and behavior. I am very sensible the grounds of it I have mentioned, are not the only ones that might have been taken notice of, though I am apt to believe they are among the principal or chief. Nor is it to be imagined, that they all take place in one and the same person, or that all of them operate at all times with the same degrees of strength; men, according to their different constitutions and circumstances, are sometimes under the power of one, and sometimes another; and a careful attention to what passes within, would at last discover by what particular influence we are misled. If we have therefore remaining in us any honesty or fairness of mind, we should make it our constant business to search the source and original of all our errors, and correct these false opinions and deluding fancies that are apt to betray us into such partial and selfish mistakes; and if we would wish to

succeed in our endeavors to free ourselves from the power of self-deceit, the following directions may perhaps be thought to deserve our serious consideration :

In the first place, As affection and passion of all kinds influence the judgment, as we have naturally a greater regard to ourselves than others, as our private affections are more prevalent than the public, the former will have proportionably a greater influence upon the judgment, and will consequently determine us to be partial to ourselves, and to pronounce in our own favors; we should therefore by all means labor to lay a proper restraint upon our selfish passions, and correct every excess of them, that they may hold a just proportion with the other affections of our natures, and make up all together that uniform regular state of mind, that is agreeable to the perfect standard of moral rectitude, and necessary to lead us to that propriety of conduct and behavior, which can only make us easy in ourselves, and agreeable to all with whom we have to do. And in order to suppress the extravagancies of our private desires, we should give all manner of encouragement to those of a different kind, and frequently employ our thoughts in contemplation of their proper objects, that thus the affections of benevolence,

lence, friendship, mercy, and humanity, may be roused, excited, and drawn out to vigorous exercise, so as our selfish passions may be reduced to their proper place, may by degrees be brought to a due subordination, and instead of directing the judgment, may at last submit to receive orders and directions from it. By this means, we shall in a great measure deliver ourselves from the unreasonable influence of inferior affections, and be so much the more capable to judge impartially both of ourselves and others.

In the second place, In order to make a fair judgment of our real character, we should now and then set apart some time for the purpose of enquiring into the nature of our actions, and the principles upon which they have proceeded. While we are in the hurry of action, and are set forward by the violence of any particular passion or desire, we have no leisure to examine the reasonableness or unreasonableness of what we are about; so that, unless, when it is over, we allow ourselves to reflect on what we have been doing, we can never be sensible whether we may not have contracted some new degrees of guilt, and consequently may be very apt to imagine ourselves innocent, when perhaps it is far otherwise with us.— Besides, we are then only competent judges of
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our own conduct, when we are under no particular influence from the force of an ungratified desire; so that if we neglect to examine our behavior with calmness and deliberation, when the passion is subsided, we shall be unavoidably exposed to the mistake of those who are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.

In the third place, It may be of some service to us, in order to avoid being misled by this self partiality, to have a particular regard to the suspicious part of our characters, and to keep a steady eye over ourselves in that respect. We are generally blind to our own faults; this is the very error we want to have corrected; our friends are very improper persons to give us information, their friendship is built upon their good opinion of us, and did they see our real blemishes, they would probably cease to be our friends.—From indifferent persons, we can expect no assistance in learning to know ourselves; to our enemies therefore we ought to have recourse, to consider what part of our character one who was about to defame us would most readily attack, what particular scandal he would be most likely to fix upon us, and what the world would be most ready to believe: By this means, it is very possible we should come at the knowledge of
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some particular blemishes, which we were not aware of before, inasmuch as these commonly appear in a stronger light to others than they do to ourselves. And though it is indeed possible that we may not be guilty in these respects, yet if in plainness and honesty of heart, we fix upon that part of our character, for a particular survey and reflection, by this we shall come to be acquainted whether we are guilty or innocent, and how far we are the one or the other.

In the last place, Let us frequently address our prayers to the Searcher of hearts, in the language of the holy Psalmist, that he would search and try us, and discover to us our secret faults, that we may break off our sins by repentance, and may in reality attain to that happy character which we foolishly imagine ourselves to be already possessed of; since, however deep our iniquities may be laid from our own sight, and consequently, however innocent we may take ourselves to be, our judgment is not always the judgment of God, nor is that man righteous who commends himself, but he whom the Lord commendeth.—Upon the whole, let us be careful to consider, that whatever cheat we may put upon ourselves, however we may disguise

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our characters or actions to our own minds, there is nevertheless an eternal difference between good and evil, between right and wrong, between fit and unfit; so that things are what they are, by the invariable constitution of Almighty God, and their natural consequences will naturally follow, nor is it in the power of self-deceit in reality to mend the matter.—The result of all therefore is, That with simplicity and fairness we keep innocence, and take heed unto the thing that is right; for this alone shall bring a man peace at the last.

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END of the FIRST VOLUME.